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THE GOSPEL ITS OWN ADVOCATE.

BY

GEORGE GRIFFIN, LL.D.
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P R E F A C E.

It may be justly inferred from the title-page to this volume, that it treats mainly of the internal evidences of Christianity. For should the Gospel assume the form of a living, speaking man, and, like Paul before Agrippa, plead, with outstretched hand, its cause before the countless myriads of human kind, it would doubtless place its chief reliance on its own Sacred Pages. Nevertheless, the author will not deem himself precluded by the title-page from sometimes overstepping the line generally regarded as the boundary between the intrinsic and external departments of the evangelical proofs. Those departments are not hostile or foreign territories, in their mutual relations ; and an essay on the one may occasionally invoke aid from the other, without essentially violating the laws of its unity.

Nor does the author mean to profess by the title-page, that he is about to condense within his narrow bounds all the inherent demonstrations of the divinity of the New Testament. Those demonstrations are exceedingly numerous; they multiply under every fresh perusal of the Holy Volume; and he can only select from the inexhaustible storehouse such views as have most forcibly impressed themselves on his own meditations.

The scriptural prophecies, and their stupendous fulfilments, are usually classed in the external department of the christian proofs. Yet the author, irrespective of mere geographical distinctions, would gladly have attempted their discussion, had his limits allowed it. The argument from prophecy is one of the most powerful weapons in the armory of sacred truth. The christian fathers thought it even more conclusive than that founded on miracles; and it is stronger now than it was when the fathers wrote. It has gathered new confirmation from the lapse of centuries. But it requires a minute exposition of all the predictions of the Old Testament, as well as of the New, and a close historical survey

of their wonderful accomplishments, perfected and progressive. The subject would supply ample materials for an independent work of no inconsiderable length. Had the author attempted to abridge it within his brief essay, he would, by mutilating, have rendered powerless, so far as in him lay, the mighty argument founded on prophecy fulfilled.



C O N T E N T S.

CHAPTER I.

JESUS CHRIST WAS A REAL PERSONAGE—AND THE GOSPEL WAS
PUBLISHED AT THE TIME IT PURPORTS TO HAVE BEEN.

PAGE

Heathen testimonies—Passage from Tacitus—Its genuineness admitted by the infidel Gibbon—Character of Tacitus as an historian—Suetonius—Pliny—His letter to Trajan—Trajan's reply—Their genuineness admitted by Gibbon—Pontius Pilate—Usage of republican and imperial Rome for procurators of provinces to transmit to central government accounts of extraordinary events within their jurisdiction—Early christian fathers constantly stated that Pilate had communicated to Tiberius an account of Christ's trial, death, and alleged resurrection, with the accompanying prodigies—No heathen writer ever denied existence of document—Yet pagan Rome suppressed it—Inference inevitable that she suppressed the document because it would have proved the prodigies accompanying the crucifixion, and the consequent divinity of Jesus Christ, 15

CHAPTER II.

THE SAME SUBJECT CONTINUED.

Further heathen testimonies—Celsus wrote against Christianity about one century after promulgation of Gospel—Extracts from his works—Admits that Jesus Christ was a real Personage—And that Gospel was written by his primitive disciples—Admits generally the Gospel history—Virtually admits its miracles—

Doctor Doddridge's estimate of the extracts from Celsus—Porphyry wrote against Christianity about the year two hundred and seventy—Speaks of Jesus Christ as a real Personage—and of Gospel as written by his primitive disciples—Some extracts from his works—Emperor Julian wrote against Christianity about the year three hundred and sixty—Admits reality of Jesus Christ and antiquity of Gospel—Extracts from his works—Jewish testimonies—Josephus—The Mishna—The Talmuds,	40
--	----

CHAPTER III.

DIVINE REVELATION WAS COEVAL WITH THE CREATION OF MAN.

Any supernatural communication from God a divine revelation—No matter what its form or subject—Human race not from everlasting—Man created without instinct of brutes, or innate ideas to guide him—Our primeval ancestors at their creation were but grown-up infants—Utterly inexperienced, they would have perished from hunger, thirst, cold, or casualties, without supernatural instruction—Such instruction a divine revelation—General expectation of heathen world before birth of Christ that moral light was about to dawn,	68
--	----

CHAPTER IV.

THE THEOLOGY OF THE GOSPEL.

Works of God and of man distinguishable by inspection—Whether God or man made Gospel is determinable by its internal evidence—Moral attributes of God not discoverable by reason—Yet reason perceives divine truthfulness of their delineation in Gospel—Style of Bible—Atonement beyond mortal contrivance—Yet when revealed, reason must recognize it the work of God—The Trinity—A mystery too profound and startling for impostors to have incorporated into work of fiction,	83
---	----

CHAPTER V.

THE MORALITY OF THE GOSPEL.

- Gospel system of ethics like solar system in fewness and simplicity of its principles—Consists in love to God and love to man—Regulates thoughts and intents of heart—Disclaims heroic virtues—Places humility in front rank of its graces—Has chivalry of its own—Paul and Julius Cæsar contrasted—Other evangelical graces—Forgiveness of injuries—Universal beneficence—Victory over world—Sanctions of Gospel, 105

PAGE

CHAPTER VI.

THE CHARACTER OF JESUS CHRIST.

- Difficulty of delineating character—Especially that of perfect man—Delineation of perfect man reserved for fishermen of Galilee—They had no human model—Difficulty enhanced by the fact that the Christ of the Gospel enshrined the second person of the Trinity—Infidelity gains nothing by supposing that Christ was the deceiver and his biographers the dupes—Enacting perfect character more difficult than even delineation of one—His blended meekness, lowliness and majesty—His humiliation surpassed what mere man would have voluntarily endured or conceived—His piety—His benignity—His beneficence—Cases of Bartimeus—the sinful woman who anointed his feet—the prodigal son—his restoring Lazarus to life—his weeping over Jerusalem, 128

CHAPTER VII.

THE SAME SUBJECT CONTINUED.

- Wisdom of Jesus Christ—His sermon on the mount—Other cases of his unearthly wisdom—He was the pa-

- tron and personification of holy friendship—His parting interview with his disciples—His simplicity—His manner of teaching—His indifference to human fame—Silence of Gospel concerning his personal appearance, . . 143

CHAPTER VIII.

THE SAME SUBJECT CONTINUED.

- Trial of Jesus Christ—His grandeur and humility—Incidents of his trial—Conduct of Judas—No other traitor ever induced by compunctionous visitings to commit suicide—His remorse and self-murder were dying confessions of the innocence and godhead of his Master—Fall and penitence of Peter—Conduct of Pontius Pilate—The crucifixion of Jesus Christ—He spoke seven times from the cross—And as man never spoke—Bad men could not have forged the character of Jesus Christ if they would—And good men would not have forged it if they could—Extract from Rousseau, 157

CHAPTER IX.

THE MIRACLES OF THE GOSPEL.

- Miracles of Christianity internal proofs of divinity—Science of juridical evidence applied to christian history—Writers of Gospel not deceived—Miracles palpable to senses—abiding in effects—infallible—no collusion—open and public—continued for years in presence of friends and foes—Writers of Gospel had good sense and sound understanding—Deposed from personal knowledge—Paul knew with certainty whether miracles of his conversion and those wrought by himself were real—Writers of Gospel eight in number—Testimonies equivalent to judicial depositions, . . . 177

CHAPTER X.

THE SAME SUBJECT CONTINUED.

- Writers of Gospel not deceivers—Truth has a manner of its own—Directness, simplicity, and ingenuousness of evangelical witnesses—Examples of their candor—Purity of their moral character—Proved by their writings—by history—by the confessions of infidels—Had not primitive christians been of pure character, new faith would not have outlived its Founder—Writers of Gospel consistent in narratives, doctrines, and precepts, without studied uniformity, 200

PAGE

CHAPTER XI.

THE SAME SUBJECT CONTINUED.

- Writers of Gospel had no motive to deceive—Not moved by revenge—or prejudice—or hope of temporal emolument—or desire to gain fame by tales of wonder—Incurred by their testimony certain obloquy, privations and sufferings, and probable torture and martyrdom—Conditions of discipleship foretold from beginning—Martyrdom, though not always proving orthodoxy, proves sincerity of victims, 215

CHAPTER XII.

THE SAME SUBJECT CONTINUED.

- Auxiliary and supplemental witnesses to christian miracles—Gospel made miracles test of its divinity—Age of miracles continued about seventy years—During miraculous age all christians had sure means of ascertaining genuineness of miracles—Bore testimony to their genuineness by perilous adhesion to persecuted faith—Miracles the evidences of title to the promised inheritance above—Seekers after truth of Gospel would scrutinize closely these evidences before giving up all to purchase inheritance—Witnesses to miracles thus mul-

- tiplied to many thousands—Each witness testified by his act as strongly as he could by his pen or oath—Argument of Leslie drawn from institutions of Baptism, Lord's Supper, and christian Sabbath—New Testament and Old parts of same system—if Gospel forged, so were Jewish Scriptures, 229

CHAPTER XIII.

HUME'S OBJECTION TO MIRACLES.

- Miniature of Hume's theory—Vagueness in his use of term experience—General uniformity of nature's laws proved by human testimony—So may any exceptions to that uniformity—On Hume's theory miracles not to be believed on evidence of our own senses—Evidence of senses not more infallible than well-sustained testimony of our fellow-men—Man lives in world of miracles, and is himself a miracle—No objection to miracles that they are designed to authenticate a system of religion—Such miracles imbued with intrinsic probability—No impostor ever founded new system of faith on miracles, 244

CHAPTER XIV.

THE MIRACLE OF THE NEW BIRTH.

- Regeneration wrought by special power of Holy Ghost against laws of our fallen nature—It is a miracle endorsing and authenticating Gospel—Each true believer “hath the witness in himself” that he has been born again, and that Gospel is true—Miracle of new birth evidence to all the world of Gospel's truth—Each participant of eucharist makes solemn affirmation by the act of participation that, according to his best belief, he has been born again—Such affirmation equivalent to deposition in court—These depositions amount to many hundreds of millions—Deponents all deceivers, or deceived; or else new birth a reality, and Gospel from God—New birth standing miracle, 259

CHAPTER XV.

THE MORAL INCONGRUITIES OF MAN.

PAGE	
Man in his moral being destitute of harmony of organization belonging to other creations of God—Is compound of meanness and majesty—at once brutal and godlike—Elements of his contrarious nature in collision with each other—Philosophy could not explain the enigma—Bible explains it—Man made upright and pure—but sinned and fell—Thoughts on the apostasy—The fall the only solution of mysteries of our being—Sin unnatural evil—Usurper of human heart—Man an enemy to God—hence he takes his name in vain—and worships idols—Man not originally made a God-hater by God himself—Conscience and sin not twin brothers of same birth—Gospel's solution of mysteries of our being proof of its divinity—Cause suggested of God's delay in final punishment of sin,	280

CHAPTER XVI.

THE PROMULGATION OF THE GOSPEL.

Early and rapid spread of Gospel proved by Gospel itself, and by secular and ecclesiastical histories—Formidable impediments to its progress—Was exclusive and uncompromising—Opposed to prejudices and expectations of Jews—Country of its origin awakened prejudices of gentiles—Heathen superstition deeply entrenched in minds of nations—Retainers of polytheism roused themselves to oppose invasion of Christianity—Recoiling from open argument, they employed foulest slanders—Polytheism closely interwoven with civil government—which was invoked and came to her rescue—Roman empire embraced whole civilized world—Sufferings in Nero's gardens specimens of other sufferings—General population joined in persecuting christians—Intrinsic impediments Gospel had to encounter—Opposed to
--

- pride, passions, and propensities of fallen man—Gospel made the moral reformation of its votaries a test of its truth—and that in an age of universal corruption—Human instrumentality employed in spread of Gospel inadequate to exigency—Its promulgators a few Jewish peasants—the most despised members of a despised nation—Contrast between martial conquests and the conquests achieved by Gospel, 297

CHAPTER XVII.

THE SAME SUBJECT CONTINUED.

- Character of Gibbon as an historian—Would have discovered any defect in foundations of Christianity—Bound to give some cause of prodigious spread of Gospel—Denying divine agency, he assigned five causes merely human—His five causes stated—First cause—Zeal of primitive christians—Was met by counter zeal of Jews and heathen—Second cause—Doctrine of future life—Hell revealed by Gospel appalling and repulsive—Even its heaven not suited to tastes of depraved heart—Third cause—Miraculous powers ascribed to primitive church—Arrogation of such powers, without their possession, a fraud easily detected—Fourth cause—Pure morals of early christians—Their pure morals proof of efficacy and truth of Gospel—Gibbon's attempt to explain their pure morals—Fifth cause—Union and discipline of christian republic—No federative union of churches until close of second century—And before then Gospel had achieved signal triumphs—No event in history parallel to primitive spread of Christianity—Imposture of Mohammed—Modern missions, 324



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HAD the New Testament been found amidst the ruins of Pompeii, or on some desert island unmarked by human footsteps, the finder, though ignorant of its previous history, must have inferred its inspiration from the originality, holiness and grandeur of

its contents. Yet would he have been aided in his exploration of the Sacred Pages by proof, derived from some independent and sure source, that Jesus Christ was not a fictitious personage, and that the newly discovered volume, detailing his birth, life, death, resurrection and doctrines, had been composed by his faithful contemporaries. We have, therefore, deemed it a fitting introduction to our remarks upon the internal evidences of Christianity, to show, from the direct confessions or speaking silence of the ancient pagan and Jewish enemies of our faith, that its reputed founder actually lived and taught; that he suffered martyrdom under Pontius Pilate in the reign of Tiberius Cæsar; and that the various books forming the Gospel were written and promulgated by his primitive disciples. To this preliminary object we shall devote the present chapter and that immediately ensuing.

The great fire at Rome occurred in the tenth year of Nero's reign, about thirty years after the crucifixion; and the tyrant was more than suspected of being himself the incendiary. Forty years after the fire, Tacitus, long domiciled in the imperial capital, wrote, under the form of annals, his history of the four immediate successors of Augustus. Speaking of the conflagration, and of the efforts of

Nero to divert suspicion from himself by substituting in his place some feigned criminals, Tacitus says :

" With this view he inflicted the most exquisite torments on those men, who, under the vulgar appellation of christians, were already branded with deserved infamy. They derived their name and origin from Christ, who, in the reign of Tiberius, had suffered death by the sentence of the procurator, Pontius Pilate. For a while this dire superstition was checked, but it again burst forth, and not only spread itself over Judea, the first seat of this mischievous sect, but was even introduced into Rome, the common asylum which receives and protects whatever is impure, whatever is atrocious. The confessions of those who were seized discovered a vast multitude of their accomplices ; and they were all convicted, not so much for the crime of setting fire to the city, as for their hatred of human kind. They died in torments, and their torments were embittered by insult and derision. Some were nailed on crosses ; others sewn up in the skins of wild beasts, and exposed to the fury of dogs ; others again, smeared over with combustible materials, were used as torches to illuminate the darkness of the night. The gardens of Nero were destined for the melancholy spectacle, which was accompanied with a horse race, and honored with the presence of the emperor, who mingled with the populace in the dress and attitude of a charioteer. The guilt of the christians deserved, indeed, the most exemplary punishment ; but the public abhorrence was changed into commiseration from the opinion

that those unhappy wretches were sacrificed, not so much to the public welfare, as to the cruelty of a jealous tyrant."

We have, with a single verbal correction, adopted Gibbon's translation of this memorable passage. The persecution under Nero and the genuineness of the passage from Tacitus are admitted by the infidel historian of the "Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire," who says :

"The most skeptical criticism is obliged to respect the truth of this extraordinary fact, and the integrity of this celebrated passage of Tacitus. The former is confirmed by the diligent and accurate Suetonius, who mentions the punishment which Nero inflicted on the christians, a sect of men who had embraced a new and criminal superstition. The latter may be proved by the consent of the most ancient manuscripts; by the inimitable character of the style of Tacitus; by his reputation, which guarded his text from the interpolations of pious fraud; and by the purport of his narration, which accused the first christians of the most atrocious crimes, without insinuating that they possessed any miraculous or even magical powers above the rest of mankind."*

To appreciate the value of this authenticating

* Gibbon's Rome, Vol. II. p. 399.

testimonial, we must bear in mind, not only the profound acquaintance of Gibbon with the events and writings of the Augustan age and his consequent capacity to detect any interpolation in the Roman classics, but also his virulent hostility to the faith of the cross, to which the world is, perhaps, indebted for his immortal work, and which would have impelled him to expose to detestation and contempt any imposture favoring the new religion, and to cast its obloquy on the christian name. Nothing but the affectation of historic impartiality could have wrung from him his concession of the genuineness of a passage so adverse to the hopes of infidelity, so confirmatory of the facts of the Gospel.

The classic Tacitus was a stranger to the treasures of evangelical truth. It is not likely that he ever had in his hands a copy of any part of the Gospel. Had he known its pure ethics and sublime theism, he would not have termed it a "dire superstition;" nor would he have condemned the primitive christians "for their hatred of human kind." Even Gibbon, in an ostentatious ebullition of assumed candor, declares :

"If we seriously consider the purity of the christian religion, the sanctity of its moral precepts, and the innocent

as well as the austere lives of the greater number of those who, during the first ages, embraced the faith of the gospel, we should naturally suppose that so benevolent a doctrine would have been received with due reverence even by the unbelieving world ; that the learned and polite, however they might deride the miracles, would have esteemed the virtues of the new sect ; and that the magistrates, instead of persecuting would have protected an order of men who yielded the most passive obedience to the laws, though they declined the active care of war and government.”*

But Tacitus, though he had not studied the Gospel, had profoundly studied the annals of his country. Nothing in its history was beyond his grasp or beneath his notice. He narrated facts with a precision and accuracy never surpassed by a secular historian. His success in literature was equalled by his acquirements in the science of human nature. He was familiar alike with the court and with the closet. Born only about twenty years after the crucifixion, he was almost contemporary with Jesus of Nazareth. Upon his boyish imagination had been impressed the tragedy in the gardens of Nero ; his manly eye had watched the phenomenon of the Gospel’s progress ; the very name of the new sect

* Gibbon’s Rome, Vol. II. p. 374.

pointed to their Founder ; no peradventure can rest upon the facts stated in the extract from Tacitus. That memorable passage is plenary proof that Jesus Christ really lived and taught and suffered martyrdom under the sentence of Pontius Pilate in the reign of Tiberius ; and that he was the Author of Christianity, which survived his crucifixion, and, having overspread Judea, had, anterior to the great conflagration, made its entrance into the imperial city.

“The diligent and accurate Suetonius,” as Gibbon correctly describes him, speaks thus of the primitive faithful in narrating the events of Nero’s reign ; “The christians, a set of men of a new and mischievous superstition, were punished.”

During the years one hundred and six and one hundred and seven of the christian era, Pliny was intrusted by the emperor Trajan with the government of Bithynia and Pontus, distant provinces upon the Euxine. He found the provinces, notwithstanding their remoteness from Judea, filled with christians, and in one of those years wrote to his imperial master for instructions how he was to proceed with them. The letter of Pliny and the answer of Trajan, now extant, are unquestionably genuine. Even Gibbon admits their authenticity ;

and thence argues in favor of the lenity of the Roman government towards the christian sect.* The letter and answer are familiar to every scholar, but they cannot be too often in print; and as we may have occasion to refer to them in various parts of our argument, we here present them entire in the nervous translation of Milner:

PLINY TO TRAJAN.

“ Health. It is my usual custom, Sir, to refer all things of which I harbor any doubts to you. For who can better direct my judgment in its hesitation, or instruct my understanding in its ignorance? I never had the fortune to be present at any examination of christians before I came into this province. I am, therefore, at a loss to determine what is the usual object of inquiry or of punishment, and to what length either of them is to be carried. It has also been with me a question very problematical, whether any distinction should be made between the young and the old, the tender and the robust; whether any room should be given for repentance, or whether the guilt of christianity, once incurred, is incapable of being expiated by the most unequivocal retraction; whether the name itself, abstracted from any flagitiousness of conduct, or the crimes connected with the name, be the object of punishment. In the mean time this has been my method with respect to those who were brought before me as christians. I asked them

* Gibbon's Rome, Vol. II. p. 409, 410.

whether they were christians; if they pleaded guilty, I interrogated them twice afresh, with a menace of capital punishment. In case of obstinate perseverance, I ordered them to be executed. For of this I had no doubt, whatever was the nature of their religion, that a sullen and obstinate inflexibility called for the vengeance of the magistrate. Some were infected with the same madness, whom on account of their privilege of citizenship, I reserved to be sent to Rome to be referred to your tribunal. In the course of this business, informations pouring in as is usual when they are encouraged, more cases occurred. An anonymous libel was exhibited with a catalogue of names of persons who yet declared that they were not christians then or ever had been; and they repeated after me an invocation of the gods and of your image, which for this purpose I had ordered to be brought with the images of the deities. They performed sacred rites with wine and frankincense and execrated Christ, none of which things I am told, a real christian can ever be compelled to do. On this account I dismissed them. Others, named by an informer, first affirmed and then denied the charge of christianity, declaring that they had been christians but had ceased to be so, some three years ago, others still longer, some even twenty years ago. All of them worshipped your image, and the statues of the gods, and also execrated Christ, and this was the account which they gave of the nature of the religion they once had professed, whether it deserves the name of crime or error; namely, that they were accustomed on a stated day to meet before daylight, and to repeat among themselves a hymn to Christ as to a god,

and to bind themselves by an oath with an obligation of not committing any wickedness, but on the contrary, of abstaining from thefts, robberies and adulteries ; also of not violating their promise, or denying a pledge ; after which it was their custom to separate and meet again at a promiscuous, harmless meal ; from which last practice they, however, desisted after the publication of my edict, in which, agreeably to your orders, I forbade any societies of that sort. On which account I judged it the more necessary to inquire BY TORTURE from two females, who were said to be deaconesses, what is the real truth, but nothing could I collect, except a depraved and excessive superstition. Deferring, therefore, any further investigation, I determined to consult you. For the number of culprits is so great as to call for serious consultation. Many persons are informed against of every age, and of both sexes, and more still will be in the same situation. The contagion of the superstition hath spread, not only through cities, but even villages and the country. Not that I think it impossible to check and to correct it. The success of my endeavors hitherto forbids such desponding thoughts ; for the temples, once almost desolate, begin to be frequented ; and the sacred solemnities, which had long been intermitted, are now attended afresh ; and the sacrificial victims are now sold everywhere, which could once scarce find a purchaser. Whence I conclude that many might be reclaimed were the hope of impunity on repentance absolutely confirmed."

TRAJAN TO PLINY.

“ You have done perfectly right, my dear Pliny, in the inquiry which you have made concerning christians. For truly no one general rule can be laid down, which will apply itself to all cases. These people must not be sought after. If they are brought before you and convicted, let them be capitally punished ; yet with this restriction, that if any renounce christianity and evidence his sincerity by supplicating our gods, however suspected he may be for the past, he shall obtain pardon for the future on his repentance. But anonymous libels in no case ought to be attended to ; for the precedent would be of the worst sort, and perfectly incongruous to the maxims of my government.”

The letter of Pliny was written about seventy years after the crucifixion ; and it carries along with it plenary demonstration that, at the time of its date, Christianity had thoroughly pervaded the provinces of which he was governor. He says ; “ Many persons are informed against of every age and of both sexes, and more still will be in the same situation. The contagion of the superstition hath spread not only through cities, but even villages and the country.” He affirms that until the adoption of his vigorous measures against the innovating faith, the temples of the polytheists had been

deserted, their profane solemnities long intermitted, and that the sacrificial victims could scarcely have found a purchaser. This strong language is used without limitation; it is applied, not to particular sections alone, but to the entire countries under his jurisdiction.

Nor did Pliny intimate that the evangelical religion had just risen, like a sudden meteor, above the horizon. He reports that some of the prisoners, though they had denied under the terrors of threatened death that they were then christians, admitted that they had been such more than twenty years before. It follows that more than twenty years before their examination, and therefore within the first half-century after the crucifixion, the Gospel had accomplished its triumphal march even to the sequestered borders of the Black Sea. The letter of the Roman governor caused no surprise at the imperial court. The emperor treated "the contagion" of Pontus and Bithynia, not as a strange phenomenon peculiar to those provinces, but as a noxious poison common to his vast dominions.

Pliny's letter illustrates other important truths. It shows that the christian church revered Jesus Christ as its Founder, and worshipped him as God;

that it had its sabbaths, its officers, its regular assemblies, its code of theism and of ethics; that its doctrines and precepts enjoined abstinence from thefts, robberies, adulteries, violations of promise, and all manner of wickedness; and that the real believer was ever ready to endure the torture and the death, rather than abjure his faith.

The correspondence between the provincial governor and his imperial master does not speak in terms of the existence of any christian writings. But the inference is strong, that, at that enlightened period, a religious system so completely organized, embodying such a code of doctrinal and practical truths, professing to be proclaimed for the instruction and salvation of mankind, would not have been allowed to rest for seventy years after the death of its Founder on mere oral communication. The Augustan age ended not with the life of Augustus; but, like the Elizabethan era, continued long after the death of the sovereign from whom it derived its name. It was an age distinguished for the written effusions of mind. For the sword of the iron republic had been substituted the pen of the lettered empire. It would have been passing strange had christian zeal and intelligence left unrecorded, for three score years and ten, the birth,

teachings, miracles, death and resurrection of the Son of God. The antiquity of the evangelical writings is a necessary deduction from the correspondence between Pliny and the sovereign of the Roman world.

It was the immemorial usage of republican and imperial Rome, that each governor of a province should transmit to the central authority of the state official accounts of all extraordinary events occurring within his jurisdiction. Of this custom the letter from Pliny to Trajan is a memorable example. Such usage is necessarily incident to all states possessing conquered or detached provinces. If the crucifixion of Jesus Christ was a reality, it was an extraordinary event. He had claimed to be a divine person, and the author of stupendous miracles; his disciples publicly announced his resurrection from the dead. These things were within the knowledge of Pontius Pilate, the procurator of Judea. That he officially communicated to Tiberius the tale of wonders, is a conclusion to be drawn from the circumstances of the case, without the aid of extraneous evidence. Had he omitted the communication he would have violated the ancient and universal usages of the commonwealth and of the empire; he would have been guilty of a

gross breach of official duty ; he would have been justly amenable to the censure of the emperor, and to ignominious expulsion from office. The presumption that public magistrates have duly performed the obligations imposed on them by their respective stations, is a fundamental principle of universal jurisprudence.

But the intrinsic presumption that Pilate transmitted to the Roman government his official report of the life, death, and alleged resurrection of Jesus Christ is confirmed by extraneous evidence. The fact of his report is repeatedly averred by the early christian fathers. Speaking of the wonderful demonstrations which accompanied the crucifixion of our Lord, Justin Martyr, in his first Apology for Christianity, addressed to the authorities of the Roman empire, about the year one hundred and forty of the christian era, thus speaks ; " And that these things were so done, you may know from the acts written in the time of Pontius Pilate."* Tertullian in his Apology for the new faith, also addressed to the Roman government, and written about the year one hundred and ninety-eight, speaks thus ; " Of all these things relating to Christ, Pilate, him-

* Justin Martyr, Apol. prima, p. 65, 72.

self in conscience already a christian, sent an account to Tiberius, then emperor."* And elsewhere, in the same chapter, he thus appeals to the pagan authorities ; "Search your own public documents. At the moment of Christ's death, the light departed from the sun, and the land was darkened at noon ; which wonder is related in your own annals, and is preserved in your archives to this day."

Eusebius, who wrote about the year three hundred and fifteen, speaks in this manner ; "When the wonderful resurrection of our Saviour and his ascension to heaven were in the mouths of all men, it being an ancient custom for governors of provinces to write to the emperor and give him an account of new and remarkable occurrences, that he might not be ignorant of anything, Pilate informed the emperor of the resurrection of Christ, and likewise of his reputed miracles, and that, being raised up after he had been put to death, he was already believed by many to be a god.† The report of Pontius Pilate to Tiberius is also affirmed by Epiphanius, Chrisostom, Orosius, and Gregory of Tours.

* Tertullian, Apol. c. 21.

† Euseb. Eccl. Hist. lib. 11, c. 2.

Modern infidels have affected to sneer at these statements of the christian fathers. But the statements were never contradicted by the heathen infidels of the first four centuries. Celsus attempted an elaborate confutation of the new faith, and published his treatise about the year one hundred and seventy-five, and thirty-five years after the appearance of Justin Martyr's first Apology. The pagan unbeliever had the christian work before him, and must have studied it diligently, page by page and sentence by sentence. Why did not the learned and vindictive Celsus meet and contradict the bold appeal of Justin Martyr to "the acts written in the time of Pontius Pilate?" He did not because he dared not. By such contradiction he would have come into direct collision with the public records of the empire.

About the year two hundred and seventy, and a little more than seventy years after the publication of Tertullian's Apology, heathen infidelity, personified by Porphyry, one of its most renowned champions, made its second great effort to write down the faith of the cross. Open before the eyes of Porphyry lay the writings of the two christian apologists; his ears he could not close to the challenge of Tertullian, "Search your own public doc-

uments." How overwhelming must have been the triumph of the pagan combatant could he have averred and shown that the imperial archives contained not the pretended report from the procurator of Judea. How would the christian world have been humbled and confounded as it gazed on the public immolation of its two favorite advocates by infidel hands, not as martyrs to the truth, but as fabricators of falsehood! Yet upon the pressing emergency, the wary Porphyry stood speechless as the grave!

In the fourth century, and about fifty years after Eusebius had reiterated the standing appeal of evangelical antiquity to Pilate's official report of the crucifixion, the apostate Julian brandished his imperial pen against the new religion. He was an accomplished scholar and a profound statesman. His own experience had impressed on his mind the ancient and universal usage of the empire, requiring from governors of provinces official reports of such extraordinary events as marked their administrations. He had before him the works of Justin Martyr, of Tertullian and of Eusebius. He could not be ignorant that the appeal of the faithful to the report of Pontius Pilate had been sounded and echoed and reverberated along the track of centu-

ries. He must have felt the pressure of the appeal. Yet even the emperor Julian passed over in ominous silence the subject of that memorable letter from the governor of Judea to his imperial master, which, unless subtracted by pagan cunning, still survived a speaking witness from his own archives.

It is a principle of universal justice that, if a party rightfully demands the production of a document in the possession of his adversary, its non-production creates a decisive presumption against the party withholding it. For its suppression must have been prompted by views incompatible with the development of truth. This principle strongly commends itself to the common sense of mankind. The official report of the crucifixion, transmitted by Pilate to Tiberius, was a document perhaps decisive of the great controversy between Christianity and unbelief. It was in the hostile custody of heathen Rome, who ought to have held it for the common benefit of all her subjects. The advocates of primitive Christianity appealed to the document, and demanded its production, and named the place of its custody, and stated its momentous contents. The champions of paganism remained dumb as the idols they worshipped. This silence, continued for

centuries, was a virtual confession in that vast temple of justice, whose circumference was earth and whose canopy was heaven—made in the presence of men, angels and God—binding through all ages of time—that the christian asseverations of the existence and contents of the document were “the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.”

The scriptural account of the conduct of Pontius Pilate while sitting in his judgment hall, fortifies the belief that he must have sent to his imperial sovereign just such a report as the early christian fathers affirmed. At the close of the trial of his Creator, he could not choose but “believe and tremble.” Then followed the rending of the rocks, the quaking of the earth and the darkening of the sun, so demonstrative of the divinity of the Crucified. To none of these events was the Roman governor a stranger. Nor could he have closed his ears to the startling intelligence that the dead had risen to life. In his communication to the imperial government, he would not have been likely to suppress the astounding miracles, or his own conviction that the condemned, the executed, the resuscitated Martyr was the Son of God. No wonder that heathen Rome suppressed, and finally

destroyed the procurator's official report. For, to the impartial students of truth, the report of Pontius Pilate would have demonstrated, not only the existence and martyrdom of Jesus Christ, but even his very godhead.

Modern unbelief may possibly suggest that, the original works of Celsus, Porphyry and Julian being lost, we have no grounds at the present day for the conclusion that they did not controvert Pilate's alleged letter to Tiberius. But such conclusion is sustained, not only by the copious fragments of those infidel works transcribed and preserved in various christian writings, but also by the controlling fact that, while the works of Celsus, Porphyry and Julian remained entire, christian authors went on for centuries reiterating the charge of the letter from the procurator of Judea to the Roman emperor, without the slightest intimation that the existence of the letter had ever been controverted or doubted. Had Celsus denied the charge of Justin Martyr, Tertullian, who wrote about twenty-five years after Celsus, would not have dared to repeat it, without some allusion to its negation. Had Porphyry denied the charge, it would not have been again unqualifiedly repeated by Eusebius, who wrote about forty-five years after

Porphyry. And had the emperor Julian about the year three hundred and sixty, denied the charge, it would not have been still repeated by Epiphanius, who wrote about the year three hundred and seventy, and by Chrisostom, who wrote about the year four hundred, and by Orosius, who wrote about the year four hundred and twenty, and by Gregory of Tours, who wrote about the year five hundred and seventy.

Even when Epiphanius, Chrisostom, Orosius and Gregory gave their writings to the world, the works of Celsus, Porphyry and Julian were still in being. If the existence of the alleged letter from Pilate to Tiberius had been controverted by Celsus, Porphyry, or Julian, the two former the semi-official organs, and the latter the imperial sovereign of the pagan world, no christian author would afterwards publicly affirm its existence without some reference to its having been denied. The omission of such reference would have betrayed a want of honor and honesty; and the breach of good faith must have led to detection and exposure by heathen or Jewish enemies, to the lasting discredit of the christian name. Upon the supposition of its having been denied in the face of the world the existence of the letter was no longer an

unquestioned fact; and its subsequent averment as an unquestioned fact would have impugned the principles of common integrity. Policy, if not conscience, would have deterred any christian author from the commission of such a barefaced breach of candor. It is, then, an inevitable conclusion, that the official report of Pilate to the Roman emperor was not controverted by any pagan author of ancient times.

There was a rumor in the early church that, upon receiving the report from the governor of Judea, Tiberius proposed to the senate that Jesus Christ should be enrolled on the calendar of Roman gods; and that the senate declined the proposition because they held it to be their privilege, and not the prerogative of the emperor, to nominate the candidates for deification; and more especially because Tiberius had himself declined the acceptance of that honor from the Roman senate. Some modern writers, deeming the rumor improbable, have sought thence to cast a shade of suspicion upon the fact of Pilate's report. But between the fact and the floating rumor, no real affinity exists. The rumor was probably true; but, if unfounded, its falsity affects not the impregnable reality of the official report. Faith in history, if disturbed by

unimportant errors in collateral details, would be in danger of degenerating into universal and cheerless skepticism.

Our argument rests, not on the subsequent acts of Tiberius or of his senate, but on the original letter of Pontius Pilate, written in his official capacity and filed in the archives of the empire. It is the Roman procurator of Judea—who presided at the trial of Him of Nazareth, and marked well his godlike look and bearing—who felt the shuddering of the earth, and saw the obscuration of the physical sun when the Sun of righteousness expired—that we invoke as a paramount witness to the being and crucifixion of Jesus Christ, and the truth of our holy religion. Pontius Pilate has indeed gone to his long account. But he left his solemn attestation behind him—signed by his own hand—authenticated under his oath of office—recording at the time and place of their occurrence the astounding demonstrations of which his own senses had taken cognizance. That this transcendent document, required by the immemorial usages of republican and imperial Rome, was drawn, signed, sealed and sent to the emperor, and lodged in the depository of the national records, was expressly and continually affirmed by the primitive church,

and unequivocally admitted by the expressive silence of heathen antiquity.

We will venture to suggest, though with deference, that possibly the argument derived from the official communication of Pontius Pilate to the Roman emperor, may not have been pressed by modern advocates of the Gospel, quite as strenuously as its importance would seem to justify. In our estimate, that communication holds a conspicuous place among the christian proofs.

CHAPTER II.

THE SAME SUBJECT CONTINUED.

Further heathen testimonies—Celsus wrote against Christianity about one century after promulgation of Gospel—Extracts from his works—Admits that Jesus Christ was a real personage—And that Gospel was written by his primitive disciples—Admits generally the gospel history—Virtually admits its miracles—Doctor Doddridge's estimate of the extracts from Celsus—Porphyry wrote against Christianity about the year two hundred and seventy—Speaks of Jesus Christ as a real personage—And of Gospel as written by his primitive disciples—Some extracts from his works—Emperor Julian wrote against Christianity about the year three hundred and sixty—Admits reality of Jesus Christ and antiquity of Gospel—Extracts from his works—Jewish testimonies—Josephus—The Mishna—The Talmuds.

THE demonstration from heathen testimonials that Jesus Christ was not a fictitious personage, and that the Gospel was composed and published by his faithful contemporaries, will be rendered more perfect by a closer review of the fragments transmitted to us from the works of the three distinguished unbelievers who wrote elaborate treatises against Christianity during the earliest centuries of the church. We shall now present copious extracts from these fragments. Most of the proposed

extracts are irreverent; and some of them are profane. We should not stain our pages with quotations offensive to pious feeling, were it not for the consideration that we thence derive, even from the confessions of the primitive enemies to our holy faith, overwhelming evidence, never to be gainsayed even by skepticism itself, that the Gospel was not the forgery of an age posterior to its assumed date, and that its Founder actually lived and taught and suffered. We hope thus to transmute into healthful aliment the poison of infidel impiety. There is a potency in confessions from hostile lips, deliberately and intelligently made, which place them almost at the head of human proofs. "Out of thy own mouth will I judge thee," was a process of conviction strikingly approved by him who spake as never man spake.

The pagan Celsus published his voluminous and labored argument against Christianity about the year one hundred and seventy-five of the christian era. It was called "The True Word." About sixty years after its appearance Origen wrote his memorable response in eight books. The treatise of Celsus has perished; but while it remained in existence, Origen copied from it into his answer numerous passages. Through the answer of Ori-

gen we are made acquainted with the work of Celsus.

It is a rule of natural and universal jurisprudence, that whenever the original is lost, its contents may be shown by a verified copy or parol proof. This rule is a vital element of the social structure. Nothing human is beyond the reach of casualty. Mercantile instruments, sealed bonds, testamentary bequests, title papers to real estate, legislative records, may all be destroyed by conflagration or perish in the current of time. Unless lost originals could be supplied by parol proof or verified copies, society must relapse into its primeval disorganization.

No copy could be better authenticated than are the extracts from Celsus transcribed into the work of Origen. He had the original before him. The question discussed was of absorbing interest, and he knew that the original and his response would be anxiously studied by friend and foe. He stood pledged as a man and as a christian that, when he professed to quote the words of his adversary, he quoted them truly. Any designed misquotation would have been suicidal ; detection must inevitably have followed ; and the fraud would have recoiled like a thunderbolt upon his own head. His

great work bears intrinsic demonstrations of honor and candor. His extracts from Celsus are equivalent to copies verified by oath. A judicial affirmation could have imparted to them no additional sanctity.

The passages from Celsus transcribed into the pages of Origen leave no possibility of doubt that the Gospel was in existence anterior to the time when the infidel wrote. His writings show that he had studied it with a diligent, though prejudiced eye. He could not thus have studied it unless it had been antecedently in being. He could not have answered writings not then extant. Celsus introduces into his work a fictitious Jew, who is often made his speaker. In our quotations we need not distinguish between the passages professedly uttered by Celsus, and those purporting to come from the mouth of the Jew; in either case they are alike the words of the heathen philosopher.

Extracts from Celsus follow:—

“I could say many things concerning the affairs of Jesus, and those too true, different from those written by the disciples of Jesus.” “It is a fiction of theirs” (the writers of the Gospel) “that Jesus foreknew and foretold all things which befell him.” “Some of the believers, as if they were drunk, take a liberty to alter the gospel from its first wri-

ting three or four ways, or oftener, that, when they are pressed hard and one reading has been confuted, they may disown that and flee to another." "These things then we have alleged to you out of your own writings, not needing any other witnesses. Thus you are beaten with your own weapons." "He" (Jesus) "threatens and feebly reproaches when he says, 'Woe unto you,' and 'I foretell unto you:' for thereby he plainly confesseth his disability to persuade; which is so far below a God, that it is even unworthy a wise man." "O light! O truth! Jesus with his own mouth expressly declares these things as you have recorded it, that there will come unto you other men, with like wonders, wicked men and impostors." "Moses encourageth the people to get riches and destroy their enemies. But his" (God's) "Son, the Nazarean man, delivers quite contrary laws. Nor will he admit a rich man, or one that affects dominion, to have access to his Father. Nor will he allow men to take more care for food or treasure than the ravens; nor to provide for clothing, so much as the lilies: and to him that has smitten once, he directs to offer that he may smite again." "To the sepulchre there came two angels, as is said by some, or, as by others, one only." "It is but a few years since he delivered this doctrine, who is now reckoned by the christians to be the Son of God." "Having been turned out of doors by her husband, she," (the mother of our Lord) "wandered about in a shameful manner till she had brought forth Jesus in an obscure place; and he being in want, served in Egypt for a livelihood; and having there learned some charms, such as the Egyptians were fond of, he returned home, and then val-

ing himself upon those charms, he set up himself for a God." "It was given out by Jesus, that Chaldeans were moved at the time of his birth to come and worship him as a God when he was but a little child, and that this was told to Herod the tetrarch, who issued out an order to have all killed who had been born about that time, intending to kill him with the rest, lest, if he should live to mature age, he should take the government." "What occasion had you" (Jesus) "when an infant, to be carried into Egypt, lest you should be killed? A God has no reason to be afraid of death. And now an angel comes from heaven to direct you and your relations to flee into Egypt, lest you should be taken up and put to death; as if the great God, who had already sent two angels upon your account, could not have preserved you, his own Son, at home." "But if he" (Herod) "was afraid that when you was come of age you should reign in his stead, why did you not reign when you was of age? But so far from that, the Son of God wanders about, cringing like a necessitous beggar." "You say that when you was washed by John, there lighted upon you the appearance of a bird. What credible witness has said that he saw this? Or who heard the voice from heaven declaring you to be the Son of God excepting yourself: and if you are to be credited, one other of those who have been punished like yourself." "Jesus taking to himself ten or eleven abjects, vile publicans and sailors, went about with them, getting his subsistence in a base and shameful manner." "How should we take him for a God who, as we have understood, performed none of those things which were promised? But when we have judged him

guilty and would bring him to punishment, though he shamefully hid himself and fled away, yet was taken, being betrayed by those whom he called his disciples. But it became not a God to flee, nor to be taken and executed ; least of all did it become him to be deserted and betrayed by his companions, who knew all his secrets, who followed him as their master, who esteemed him a saviour and the Son and messenger of the most high God.” “ If he foretold who should betray him and who should deny him, how came it to pass that they did not fear him as a God, so that the one should not dare to betray him nor the other to deny him ? But they betrayed him and denied him ; so little did they regard him.” “ It was God who foretold these things ; therefore there was a necessity that they should come to pass. God therefore compelled his own disciples and prophets, with whom he ate and drank, to be wicked and abominable, for whose welfare above all others he ought to have been concerned. Never did man betray another with whom he sat at table. Here he who sits at table with God betrays him, and, which is still worse, God himself lays snares for those who sit at table with him, making them impious traitors.” “ If he thought fit to undergo such things, and if, in obedience to the Father, he suffered death, it is apparent that they could not be painful and grievous to him, he being a God and consenting to them. Why then does he lament and bewail, and pray that the fear of destruction may be removed, saying to this purpose, O Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass away ? ” “ Why did he not now, at last, if not before, deliver himself from this ignominy, and do justice upon them who re-

viled both him and his Father?" "They who conversed with him when alive, and heard his voice and followed him as their master, when they saw him under punishment and dying, were so far from dying with him, or for him, or being induced to despise sufferings, that they denied they were his disciples; but now-a-days you die with him." "But let us consider whether any one that has really died ever rose again in the same body, unless you think that the stories of others are indeed, as well as seem to be, fables, while your fable is probable and credible because of his voice on the cross when he expired, and the earthquake and the darkness; and because that when he was living he could not defend himself, but after he was dead he arose and showed the marks of his punishment, and how his hands had been pierced. But who saw all this? Why, a distracted woman, as you say, and one or two of the same imposture, and some dreamers, who fancied they saw things as they desired to have them, the same that has happened to innumerable people." "If he would make manifest his divine power, he should have shown himself to them that derided him, and to him that condemned him, and indeed to all; for surely he had no reason to fear any mortal blow now after he had died, and, as you say, was a God." "When he was neglected in the body, he was continually preaching to all men; but when he should have given full assurance to all men, he shows himself to one woman and his associates." "When he was punished he was seen of all, but when risen, by one; the contrary to which ought rather to have been." "If he would be hid, why was there a voice from heaven declaring him to be the



Son of God? And if he would not be hid, why did he suffer, why did he die? Is it not exceeding absurd, that you should desire and hope for the resurrection of the same body, as if we had nothing more excellent, nor more precious?" "Omitting many things that might be alleged against what they say of their master, let us allow him to be truly an angel. Is he the first, and the only one that has come? or have there been others before? If they should say, he only, they are easily convicted of falsehood: for they say that others have often come, and in particular, that there came an angel to his sepulchre, some say one, others two, to tell the women that he was risen; for the Son of God, it seems, could not open the sepulchre, but wanted another to remove the stone. And there came also an angel to the carpenter about Mary's pregnancy, and another angel to direct them to take the child and flee." "At first they" (the christians) "were few in number, and then they agreed. But being increased and spread abroad, they divide again and again, and every one will have a party of his own."*

Should any person, after reading these passages, be inclined to censure their introduction into our pages, we would plead the authority of Origen in the third century, and of Lardner in the eighteenth. These distinguished christian authors transcribed into their works, not only the passages quoted by us from Celsus, but added many others even more irreverent and profane. We would plead another

* Lardner's Credibility of Gospel History. Heathen Testimonies.

authority, perhaps still more touching to the pious heart. Lardner affirms that the devout Doddridge observed to him, that few learned men knew the importance of the remains of Celsus, and urged him to give prominence to the point when he came to treat of that heathen writer; adding "that an abridgment of the history of Christ may be found in Celsus." The sainted author of "The Rise and Progress of Religion in the Soul," compiled a copious digest of those infidel remains, which he left behind him at his decease, and which Lardner has copied at large. In that digest, Doddridge, in expatiating upon the value of the fragments of Celsus to the christian argument, thus exclaims, "Who can forbear adoring the depth of divine wisdom in laying such a firm foundation for our faith in the Gospel history, in the writings of one who was so inveterate an enemy to it, and so indefatigable in his attempts to overthrow it!"*

It is not to the antiquity of the Gospel alone that Celsus bears witness. He distinctly acknowledges that Jesus Christ was a real personage. He affirms that, having served in Egypt, "and there learned some charms," he afterwards "set up himself for a

* Lardner's Credibility of Gospel History, Vol. IV. p. 145, 147.

God ;" that he was followed by "ten or eleven abjects, vile publicans and sailors ;" that he, when the government had "judged him guilty, and would bring him to punishment," "hid himself and fled away, yet was taken, being betrayed by those whom he called his disciples." And the impious unbeliever concedes that the evangelical doctrines were delivered by Him, who was, when he wrote, "reckoned by the christians to be the Son of God." Celsus also expressly admits, that the Gospel was written by the primitive apostles. He declares ; "I could say many things concerning the affairs of Jesus, and those, too, true, different from those *written by the disciples of Jesus.*" By "the disciples of Jesus" the infidel meant not the professors of his own day. Those he sometimes terms believers, sometimes christians. It was to the earliest followers of our Lord alone that he applied the appellation of "disciples of Jesus."

When Celsus wrote in the year one hundred and seventy-five, the average age of the books composing the Gospel was something over a century. Some of them had been written a little earlier, and some a little later; but the medium date of their publication was about one hundred and fifteen years before the date assigned for the work of

Celsus. This appears from the writings of many of the christian fathers; and may be gathered from the Sacred Record itself. The era of the books composing the Gospel may also be inferred from the preserved fragments of the pagan philosopher in question. Celsus does not, indeed, expressly affirm that, when he wrote, the christian writings were about an hundred years old. But he gives no intimation that the phenomenon of Christianity had sprung up in his own lifetime. He speaks of it as the faith of a by-gone, as well as of the existing generation. He says, "They who conversed with him" (Jesus) "when alive and heard his voice and followed him as their master, when they saw him under punishment and dying, were so far from dying with him, or for him, or being induced to despise sufferings, that they denied they were his disciples; but now-a-days you die with him." Again he says; "At first they," (the faithful) "were few in number; and then they agreed. But being increased and spread abroad, they divide again and again, and every one will have a party of his own." The increase, scattering abroad, and successive divisions of the once united little band, and their array in multifarious and independent parties, were changes and revolutions which could scarcely have

been accomplished within a century after the publication of the evangelical writings. And that not much over a century had intervened between the promulgation of the Gospel and the time when Celsus wrote, is also inferable from the transcribed fragments of his work. He admits that the birth of Jesus was in the reign of Herod.

About the year two hundred and seventy of our era, the heathen Porphyry wrote his elaborate treatise against Christianity in fifteen books. His work is lost. He was answered by Methodius, Eusebius and Apollinarius. Their confutations have also perished. All the remains of the heathen treatise, to which we can have access, are to be gleaned from surviving christian writings of early date, into which they were transcribed while the work of Porphyry was in existence. These remains are few in number ; but they are decisive of the real existence of Jesus Christ, and of the antiquity of the Gospel.

In speaking of the memorable conversion of Origen to Christianity, Porphyry said :

“ An example of this absurd method may be observed in a man, whom I saw when I was very young, who was then in great esteem, and is so still for the writings which he has left behind him ; I mean Origen, whose authority is

very great with the teachers of this doctrine. For he, being a hearer of Ammonius, who was so eminent in our time for skill in philosophy, in point of learning made great improvements by the instructions of that master, but, with regard to the right way of life, took a quite different course with him. For Ammonius, a christian by birth, and brought up by christian parents, as soon as he was arrived to maturity of age, and had gained a taste for philosophy, returned to the way of life prescribed by the laws. But Origen, a Greek, and educated in the Greek sentiment, went over to the barbarian temerity ; to which he devoted himself, and corrupted himself and the principles of literature which he had received : as to his life, living as a christian, and contrary to the laws ; with regard to his sentiments concerning things and the Deity, a Greek, and joining Greek sentiments with their absurd fables."

It seems that in some copies of Matthew, extant in the days of Porphyry, the prophecy named in the thirty-fifth verse of the thirteenth chapter of that evangelist was incorrectly ascribed to Isaiah. The heathen philosopher seized with avidity on the clerical error, and thus taunted his christian opponents ; " Your evangelist Matthew was so ignorant as to say ; which was written by the prophet Isaiah, I will open my mouth in parables, I will utter things kept secret from the foundation of the world." This is palpable demonstration that the Gospel of Saint Matthew was in existence at the

time Porphyry wrote. And Porphyry must also have read the Gospel of Saint John, for he thus expressed himself; "If the Son of God be Word, he must be either outward Word or inward Word. But he is neither this nor that. Therefore he is not Word." So, also, Porphyry must have known that, long before his day, Jesus Christ had been revered as a divine Being. For he declared, "And now people wonder that this distemper has oppressed the city so many years, Esculapius and the other gods no longer conversing with men. For since Jesus has been honored, none have received any public benefit from the gods."*

The ancient christian writers, whose works survive, abound in details of the substance of Porphyry's vituperations against Christianity; but we know of no other cases where his very words have been transcribed. And in our extracts from pagan authors we would adhere to their exact language.

The emperor Julian wrote his voluminous work against Christianity about the year three hundred and sixty. His work has been destroyed by the lapse of time. Several christian fathers replied to it. Among the most distinguished was Cyril, who

* Lardner's Credibility of Gospel History: Heathen Testimonies.

wrote about sixty years after the appearance of the imperial treatise. He has assured us that he cited Julian in his own words ; and would not have compromitted his character in the face of his own assurances by fraudulent misquotation. And even the arch-skeptic Gibbon, in speaking of the work of Julian, says ; "Some fragments have been transcribed and preserved by his adversary, the vehement Cyril of Alexandria"—without daring to insinuate that the illustrious christian failed in good faith or accuracy.*

Extracts from Julian follow :

"I think it right for me to show to all men the reasons by which I have been convinced that the religion of the Galileans is a human contrivance badly put together, having in it nothing divine. But abusing the childish, irrational part of the soul which delights in fable, they have introduced a heap of wonderful works, to give it the appearance of truth." "That Moses says God was the God of Israel only and of Judea, and that they were his chosen people, I shall demonstrate presently ; and that not only he, but the prophets after him, and Jesus, the Nazarine, say the same ; yea, and Paul also, who excelled all the jugglers and impostors that ever were." "That God from the beginning took care of the Jews only, and that they were his chosen lot, appears not only from Moses and Jesus, but from Paul

* Gibbon, Vol. IV. page 81.

also ; though this may be justly thought strange in Paul : but upon every occasion, like a polypus upon the rocks, he changeth his notions of God ; at one time affirming that the Jews only are God's heritage ; at another time, to persuade the Greeks and gain them over to his side, saying, is he God of the Jews only ? Yes, of the gentiles also." "Jesus, whom you celebrate, was one of Cæsar's subjects. If you dispute it, I will prove it by and by. But it may as well be done now. For yourselves allow that he was enrolled with his father and mother in the time of Cyrenius. But after he was born, what good did he do to his relations ? For they would not, as it is said, believe on him. And yet that stiff-necked and hard-hearted people believed Moses. But Jesus, who rebuked the winds, and walked on the seas, and cast out demons, and, as you will have it, made the heaven and the earth, (though none of his disciples presumed to say this of him except John only, nor he clearly and distinctly ; however, let it be allowed that he said so) could not order his designs so as to save his friends and relations." "But Jesus having persuaded a few among you, and those the worst of men, has now been celebrated about three hundred years ; having done nothing in his lifetime worthy of remembrance, unless any thinks it a mighty matter to heal lame and blind people, and exorcise demoniacs, in the villages of Bethsaida and Bethany." "But you are so unhappy as not to adhere to the things delivered to you by the apostles ; but they have been altered by you for the worse, and carried on to yet greater impiety. For neither Paul, nor Matthew, nor Luke, nor Mark have dared to call Jesus God. But honest John, un-

derstanding that a great multitude of men in the cities of Greece and Italy were seized with this distemper, and hearing likewise, as I suppose, that the tombs of Peter and Paul were respected and frequented, though as yet privately only, however having heard of it, he then first presumed to advance that doctrine." "But you, miserable people, at the same time that ye refuse to worship the shield that fell down from Jupiter and is preserved by us, which was sent down to us by the great Jupiter, or our father Mars, as a certain pledge of the perpetual government of our city, you worship the wood of the cross, and make signs of it upon your foreheads, and fix it upon your doors. Shall we for this most hate the understanding, or pity the simple and ignorant among you who are so very unhappy as to leave the immortal gods, and go over to a dead Jew." "You have killed not only our people who persisted in the ancient religion, but likewise heretics, equally deceived with yourselves, but who did not mourn the dead man exactly in the same manner as you do. But these are your own inventions; for Jesus has nowhere directed you to do such things, nor yet Paul. The reason is, that they never expected you would have arrived at such power. They were contented with deceiving maid-servants and slaves, and by them some men and women, such as Cornelius and Sergius. If there were then any other men of eminence brought over to you, I mean in the times of Tiberius and Claudius, when these things happened, let me pass for a liar in everything I say." "But why do you not observe a pure diet as well as the Jews, but eat all things like herbs of the field, believing Peter, because he said,

What God has cleansed that call not thou common. What does that mean, unless that God formerly declared them to be impure, but now has made them clean ? For Moses speaking of four-footed beasts, says, Whatsoever divideth the hoof and cheweth the cud is clean ; but whatsoever does not do so, that is unclean. If then, since the vision of Peter, the swine has chewed the cud, let us believe him ; for that would be truly wonderful, if since Peter's vision it got that faculty. But if he feigned that vision, or, to use your phrase, the revelation at the tanner's, why should you believe him in a thing of that nature ??"*

The infidel historian of declining Rome further confirms the genuineness of the passages quoted from the apostate emperor, by affirming that Lardner has "accurately compiled all that can now be discovered of Julian's work against the christians."†

The confirmation of the Gospel history derived from these extracts, is too palpable to need labored elucidation. The royal apostate confesses that before he wrote, Jesus had been celebrated about three hundred years ; that he was enrolled with his father and mother for taxation in the time of Cyrenius ; that he rebuked the winds and walked on the seas, and healed lame and blind people, and

* Lardner's Credibility of Gospel History. Heathen Testimonies.

† Gibbon's Rome, Vol. IV. p. 81. Note G.

exorcised demoniacs in the villages of Bethsaida and Bethany; that Cornelius and Sergius had become early converts to the faith; that the chief events which the New Testament records happened in the times of Tiberius and Claudius, and were written by the apostles of Jesus. Julian expressly names, among the composers of the Gospel, Matthew, Mark, Luke, John and Paul, and refers to Peter as an apostolic chief, and, by implication at least, as an evangelical writer.

The apostate could not have been mistaken respecting the reality of the events recorded in the Gospel. Baptized and educated in the new faith, he became at twenty a convert to idolatry, and, upon ascending the throne, changed from Christian to pagan the religion of the state. The startling change demanded public vindication. In warring against the creed of his youth, he deemed the imperial pen a more efficient weapon than the stake, the cross, or the lions, so often employed in vain by his infidel predecessors. He had qualified himself for the adventurous attempt by rare attainments in classic and in sacred knowledge. Christianity was the great phenomenon of the Augustan age, and he had explored its history from its birth in the manger of Bethlehem to its assumption of

the royal diadem. With the localities and traditions of Judea he had become intimately acquainted. He had studied the prophecies of our Lord concerning the destruction of Jerusalem, and attempted to falsify those prophecies by rebuilding the holy temple. He was familiar with all the arguments and the calumnies against the religion of the Crucified, ever invented by Jewish malignancy or by heathen cunning. Had there been anything of imposture or of fable in the sacred narratives, it would not have escaped the eagle eye of the learned emperor, scanning at a glance the whole horizon of the three centuries preceding his own era. Nor did he stand alone: he was aided by all the satellites of polytheism, lay and ecclesiastical. He was the representative of the whole pagan world. His confession to the fidelity of the christian history, may be regarded as the united, the solemn, the official confession of heathen antiquity.

So much for the pagan testimonials. We now proceed to the Jewish. Josephus, the Hebrew historian, was born at Jerusalem four years after the ascension, and wrote his Jewish Antiquities in the year ninety-three of the christian era, about twenty-three years after the destruction of the holy

city. In that copious and learned work are found the following passages:—

“Bringing before them James, the brother of him who is called Christ.”* “At that time lived Jesus, a wise man, if he may be called a man, for he performed many wonderful works. He was a teacher of such men as received the truth with pleasure. He drew over to him many Jews and gentiles. This was the Christ; and when Pilate, at the instigation of the chief men among us, had condemned him to the cross, they who before had conceived an affection for him did not cease to adhere to him; for on the third day he appeared to them alive again, the divine prophets having foretold these and many wonderful things concerning him. And the sect of christians so called from him, subsists to this day.”†

If these passages are genuine they are an express recognition of the truths of Christianity extorted from the Jewish historian. But the genuineness of the passages has been denied; they have been considered, even by many christian scholars, as the interpolations of a subsequent age. Expunge the passages, and the works of Josephus contain not the slightest allusion to Jesus Christ, or to the religion of which he was the Founder. Such silence, if supposed to exist, could

* Jewish Antiq. lib. xx. cap. ix. § 1.

† Ibid. lib. xviii. cap. iii. § 3.

not have been the offspring of ignorance or of inadvertence.

It is impossible that the miracles of Christianity, which had filled the world with astonishment, should not have reached the ears and impressed themselves on the memory of the vigilant Josephus. If the early history of our faith was so familiar to the Roman Tacitus, how could it have escaped the knowledge or the recollection of the learned Hebrew? Born and brought up in Jerusalem, within sight of the garden and of the blood-stained hill, the nursery where he first began to lisp must have been vocal with the tales of wonder; the mount of Olives, and Gethsemane, and Calvary were no doubt scenes of his boyish pastimes; he may have played on the very spots where Jesus kneeled, where Jesus died.

Nor could Josephus have deemed the narrative of the carpenter's Son beneath the dignity of history. Christianity, be it a romance or a glorious reality, is the loftiest theme to which the historic muse has ever aspired. He who thought it worth his while to record the impostures of the Galilean Judas, and of the Egyptian false prophet, might well have deigned to notice the thrilling story of the cross, even had he believed it a cunningly-de-

vised fable. If Josephus, indeed, omitted any allusion to the name and miracles of Jesus Christ, the omission is far more wonderful than would have been the absence of the least allusion to the rise and progress of the Gospel in Gibbon's Fall and Decline of the Roman Empire, or the total oblivion of the Reformation in Hume's History of England.

Here, then, are presented two alternatives; either the Jewish historian actually wrote the passages we have copied from his works, affirming the messiahship of Mary's Son, or else he was silent upon the subject by design. For ourselves, we should deem the christian evidences strengthened by the adoption of the latter alternative. More impressive than words is often the admission indicated by silence. Words sometimes escape without profound thought; designed silence implies cautious deliberation.

Josephus was of the order of the priesthood. When he wrote his Jewish Antiquities, near the close of the first century, his mental vision grasped at one view the original signs and wonders of Jesus Christ; his crucifixion, with the retiring sun and the shuddering earth; the severed vail of the temple; the stupendous resurrection; the glorious

ascension; the outpouring of the Holy Ghost at pentecost; the gift of tongues; the continued apostolic miracles; the supernatural triumphs of the persecuted faith in its conquering march from kingdom to kingdom, and from continent to continent. Brooding over the ruins of Jerusalem, he read there the tremendous fulfilment of the predictions of the Son of God. Bewildered in the contemplation of all these original and supplemental marvels congregated together like mountain piled upon mountain, the Hebrew rabbi may have stood confounded and overwhelmed. Without magnanimity to admit, or hardihood to deny that his nation, headed by its priesthood, had slain the Lord of glory, the historian of the Jews might well have remained speechless. Speechlessness is a confession of guiltiness more potent than language. It was the speechlessness of the guest without the wedding garment, that crowned the evidence upon which he was justly bound hand and foot and cast into outer darkness, where is weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth.

After the death of Josephus, the meagre literature of the Jews was concentrated in their Mishna and Talmuds. The Mishna was a collection of all the Jewish traditions in six books, commencing

at a remote period of antiquity and continued until near the close of the second century, when it was published. To this original text, commentaries called the Gemara, were appended; and the text and its commentaries together constituted the Talmud. In process of time two Talmuds appeared; the Jerusalem Talmud, published about the year three hundred, in one large folio, and the Babylonian Talmud, published about the year five hundred, and which, by successive editions, has expanded into twelve folios.

It is a singular fact, that in the Mishna no distinct reference to the christian religion can be found. The Mishna was compiled by a learned Israelite, named Rabbi Judah, then rector of the Hebrew school at Tiberias, in Galilee. At the time of its compilation, the origin and spread of Christianity, and all its reported miracles, had become the wonder of the world. The heathen Celsus had recently published against the Gospel his voluminous work. Yet upon our holy religion, the Rabbi Judah was silent as the grave. Absorbed in contemplating the evangelical predictions of the destruction of Jerusalem, and their swift fulfilment in the smouldering ruins of the beloved city, the compiler of the Mishna was lost in amazement; his

tongue cleaved to the roof of his mouth ; the speechlessness of Josephus fell upon his successor.

Nor is any discussion of the truth or untruth of Christianity to be found in the Talmuds, voluminous as those publications have become. Their brief and vague allusions to the subject, while virtually admitting the antiquity of the Gospel, and that its Founder and his disciples wrought signs and wonders, affect to deride the prodigies as the artifices of magic learned in Egypt ; or as having been wrought by the right pronunciation of the ineffable name of Jehovah, stolen from the temple. Neither heathen nor Jewish pen ever dared to intimate that Jesus Christ was a fictitious personage, or that the christian Scriptures were the forgery of an age posterior to their assumed date.

We are not ignorant that there is a chain of christian authors, commencing at the apostolic era, and stretching downward until long after Christianity had permanently assumed the imperial purple, whose surviving works attest with overpowering force the genuineness and antiquity of the books composing the Gospel. These holy fathers, whose list is headed by the names of Barnabus, Clement and Hermas, the companions of the blessed Paul, were placed like watchmen along the track of de-

scending centuries, with an average interval of only about ten years between them, ever intent upon the swelling stream of salvation, and exultingly pointing upwards to its divine fountain-head. An abridgment of the testimony of this vast host of christian witnesses, fills two large quarto volumes in the great work upon the historical proofs of Christianity, entitled, "The Credibility of the Gospel History," to which we have already referred. Further compression would vitally impair the strength of the testimony. Instead of attempting its faint sketch and virtual mutilation within the limits of our brief essay, devoted chiefly to the internal evidences of the Gospel, we refer the reader to the original abridgment compiled by the patient and masterly hand of the erudite Lardner.

CHAPTER III.

DIVINE REVELATION WAS COEVAL WITH THE CREATION OF MAN.

Any supernatural communication from God a divine revelation—No matter what its form or subject—Human race not from everlasting—Man created without instinct of brutes, or innate ideas to guide him—Our primeval ancestors at their creation were but grown-up infants—Utterly inexperienced, they would have perished from hunger, thirst, cold, or casualties, without supernatural instruction—Such instruction a divine revelation—General expectation of heathen world before birth of Christ that moral light was about to dawn.

THE primary objection of skeptical philosophy against the Gospel's claim to inspiration consists in the broad proposition, that God has never condescended to make a preternatural revelation of himself to the children of men. Infidelity confines not its attacks to the miraculous outworks of christian faith; it aims its shafts at the heaven-constructed citadel within. It repudiates miracles as opposed to the common laws of nature; it discards inspiration as opposed to those higher laws by which the Almighty binds his own infinite Majesty.

We must bear carefully in mind, that any supernatural communication from God to man is a divine

revelation. Neither its form or its subject is material to its constitution. It is a divine revelation, whatever may be its form or its subject, if it has come down preternaturally from the Deity. In our present chapter, we shall attempt to prove that, before the revelation to Moses, God had imparted supernatural communications to the sons of humanity. Should the attempt be successful, it will effectually demolish the major proposition in the primary syllogism of unbelief. Our purposed demonstration will rest, not on what infidelity denounces as the deceptive evidence of the Bible, but on those natural and fixed principles which entered into the original structure of man. Should our effort prevail, it will reach the fountain-head, whence the poisonous streams of skepticism have been flowing for so long a succession of centuries.

That the generations of our race have not been of eternal continuance, is, perhaps, a self-evident truism. The supposition of a chain of infinite length, composed of finite links, without any starting-point to hang on, is an absurdity which sinks under its own downward gravitation. Nor was man's habitation from everlasting. This poor earth of ours, waxing old even in its youth, could ill have sustained the wear and convulsions of never-be-

ginning ages. If the successive generations of men were from everlasting, how must the whole race have slept "to dumb forgetfulness a prey," during the countless centuries of the early Past! How happens it that the flight of a by-gone eternity has reared no trophy to man's ethereal mind, save within the comparatively little speck of the last few thousand years?

The conclusion is inevitable, that man is not a self-existent being. He was brought into existence within the limits of time. The first progenitors of our race must have been constituted male and female; and we will suppose that they were created in the full maturity of their faculties, corporeal and intellectual. With the exact period of their formation, and the particular country in which they were located, our argument has no immediate concern. Our present object is to prove that, whenever formed and wherever placed, they must, in their state of original inexperience, have speedily and miserably perished, carrying with them into oblivion the hopes of their promised seed, unless they had been specially and preternaturally instructed from heaven. This special and preternatural instruction had all the attributes of a divine revelation.

Our earliest ancestors were doubtless cast in the common mould of humanity, untainted, indeed, by original sin. In physical powers, corporeal and mental, they differed not from their descendants. The great Locke affirms that man comes into existence without innate ideas, and that the mind is originally a sheet of white paper where experience, at her leisure, is to write her instructive lessons. His theory has been the subject of much criticism. But, perhaps, the difference between him and his critics consists in words rather than in substance. They contend that, as the acorn encloses in its small circumference the oak that may reign for centuries the monarch of the forest, so the mind, at its birth, contains within itself all the intellectual elements of the future man, waiting only occasions for their development. But they will not maintain that these elements can be developed without experience, any more than they would maintain that the acorn can be expanded into the oak without soil, moisture and heat. The theory of Locke and that of his learned opponents lead, therefore, to the same practical result. Without the teachings and culture of experience, or some miraculous instruction from above, the newly created mind must of necessity remain, on either

theory, inert and helpless from its nativity to its dissolution. It is equally certain that man has not the instinct of the brute. God bestows upon his creatures only what their natures need. The endowments of his creating goodness, like the manna of the desert, are distributed with no prodigal profusion. To man is not imparted the instinct of inferior animals, because man needs it not.

In the brute creation instinct is the substitute for reason. Instinct has made the beaver a proficient in architecture, and earned for the elephant the appellation of "half reasoning." God made man in his own image, and after his own likeness; he breathed into him the breath of life from the fountain of his own vitality. With the intellectual image of the Almighty within him, the lord of the terrestrial creation needs not the instinct of his subject animals. To man it would be superfluous; doubtless onerous. God bestows nothing in vain. The wastefulness of human prodigality can find no countenance in the example of the Highest. Reason is man's all-sufficient boon; slight are the sprinklings of instinct perceptible in the human structure.

Our primitive ancestors constituted, as their descendants are constituted, without the instinct of

the brute creation or innate ideas of competency to guide them, were, when first brought into existence, but grown-up infants. Their maturity of body and of mind was bootless without the teachings derived from experience. A person kept in a solitary prison from birth to manhood, without ever beholding the light of the blessed sun, or seeing the "human face divine," or hearing the sound of human voice, would, if suddenly emancipated from confinement and thrown upon his own undisciplined resources, find himself intellectually helpless as the new-born babe. His physical powers would little avail him; and, unless some pitying eye should find him and some helping hand be stretched forth for his relief, his dismayed and despairing spirit would speedily yearn after the water, the bread and the shelter of his dungeon home.

Our first parents, on the day of their creation, were even more infantine in knowledge than the emancipated prisoner to whom we have just alluded. The Bible affirms that God himself was their gracious Schoolmaster. Philosophy, if she rejects the scriptural account, is bound to suggest some other means that could have saved from swift destruction the inexperienced pair, cast un-

awares and without terrestrial guide upon a scene so new and strange. Unbelief, in all its hardihood, is challenged to intimate any expedient by which they could, without light from above, have survived the first year of their miserable being. We invite the eye of sympathy to explore, painful as may be the task, the fearful evils which, without a heavenly teacher, must have environed those lone tenants of a wilderness world.

The sun that first beheld the new-made ancestors of human kind, would soon go down. And what, save some cheering intimation from heaven, could have saved from frenzy the derelict pair amidst the maddening horrors of that first night? Hunger would not long delay its imperative calls. And how were the forsaken strangers to be rescued from the jaws of famine? The oracle of reason, mute in amazement, could yield no response. Experience is the only efficient purveyor for food. Feeble instinct might have conveyed to the mouth whatever substance the hand could grasp; but neither the instinct of humanity, nor reason without practice, could distinguish the nutritious from the poisonous, or discerningly choose between the wholesome fruits of the tree and the wild grass of the field. Our primeval ancestors,

created to rule this lower world, must, without divine guidance, have perished from very hunger, whilst "the cattle upon a thousand hills" rioted in plenty. Thirst would interpose its fierce claims. But what kind prompting, save from above, could conduct to the cool spring or the pure stream?

Nature might have invited the outcasts to roam through her woods. But who was to forewarn against the deadly precipice, or the raging flood? The naked wanderers would have exquisitely felt the alternations of heat and of cold. Yet how were they to learn the cool of the shade, or the warmth of raiment? The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air nests, indicated by animal instincts. But for shelter against the pitiless storm and the wintry blasts, the inexperienced pair had no skill to construct the cabin or explore the cavern. Fire is needful for the preservation of life. But without instruction from heaven, how could the first fire have been lighted? The breath of man could no more have enkindled the visible, than the vital spark. The production of flame by collision was a fortuitous discovery, requiring experience to mature. Yet our pristine ancestors survived; and skepticism, to be consistent with itself, must needs attribute their escape from impendent perils—from

death by fright or famine—by thirst or flood—by precipice or poison—by burning heat or freezing cold—not to the God who made them, but to the blind god of the atheist. In the theory of unbelief, chance was their sole preserver.

The Bible indicates that speech was communicated to our first parents by the Almighty. Philosophy, if she rejects the Mosaic account, is bound to substitute a sounder exposition of the origin of language. The use of articulate sounds for the communication of thoughts is not taught by nature. The infant cries instinctively; he instinctively applies his mouth to the maternal fountain; but he does not instinctively talk. To suppose that primitive and unaided man was the author of language, would imply a marvel stranger than that of the scriptural narrative. Why should it be thought incredible that, at the beginning, God distinguished the lord of this lower world from his subject brutes by miraculously teaching him the science of speech?

It is true that persons of different languages, cast upon a desert island, would learn to intercommunicate by signs, and ultimately, perhaps, by a rude dialect of their own formation. But they were conscious, when they met, that man had become a

speaking animal; each knew that the others, as well as himself, were familiar with the use of articulate sounds; they had but to apply a discovery, ancient and heaven-taught, to the exigency of their own case. The formation of a dialect, compounded from their mother tongues, would bear no affinity to the first creation of language. If the survivors of a fleet, stranded on some solitary coast, should from the wrecks around them, with the tools of marine architecture at hand, construct and rig out some rude craft for their escape, the achievement would sustain no comparison with the original invention of the sublime science of ship-building. And yet the science of ship-building bears to the primeval structure of language, a less proportion than the diminutive hillock bears to the majestic mountain.

The foregoing premises demonstrate that God must have imparted supernatural communications to man in the very infancy of his existence. Had the communications related solely to the concerns of time, they would still have been divine revelations. It is not a necessary element of divine revelation, that it should pertain to the awful realities of eternity. Religion has been the usual, but not the exclusive subject of inspirations from heaven. The

dream of the hardened Pharaoh was a divine revelation of the approaching famine. And yet famine is but a temporal dispensation. The Jewish code of civil jurisprudence was a divine revelation, equally with the ten commandments proclaimed from the quaking mount. The handwriting on the wall of the Chaldean palace was a divine revelation, though predicting only the tyrant's secular doom, and the extinction of the Babylonian dynasty.

Nor was the divinity of the communications to our first parents affected by the manner in which they may have been imparted. The heavenly messages were divine revelations, whether conveyed by the audible voice which afterwards thundered from Sinai, or by angel whispers, or in dreams and visions of the night. Peradventure God wrote his instructions to the infant adults with his own hand on the sheets of their inexperienced minds. Still the preternatural handwriting was a divine revelation. Perhaps the intellectual vacuum was supplied by a miraculous infusion of instinct. Still the instinctive lore, foreign to the limits of humanity, was a divine revelation.

The footsteps of divine revelation to pristine man mark every line in the first chapter of the book of nature. The pure and clear eye of candor cannot

fail to perceive them there. And observe well the accordance between that book and the book of avowed Inspiration. The first chapters of the Sacred Volume proclaim the divine revelations, for temporal objects, made to our primeval ancestors in the very morn of their being; the proclamation had been anticipated in nature's still earlier volume. The accordance between the Book of Scripture and the book of nature, establishes the truth of both. The preternatural communications recorded in nature's register, are the first link in that stupendous chain of revelations which terminated not until the close of the Apocalypse. Proof that the first link of the chain was wrought by heaven, is "confirmation strong" that the workmanship of its other links is also divine.

The sublunary wants of the world's master, so miraculously supplied, bore no greater proportion to what sin made his spiritual wants, than time bears to eternity. When God looked down from heaven on the early descendants of the original pair, he beheld them immerged in ignorance, crime and idolatry. Then came a deluge, of which earth will carry to her grave indelible marks. But all the waters of the flood could not wash from our sphere the pollutions of sin. In due time the ex-

periment of civilization was tried. Science elevated the mind, but purified not the heart. Apostate man could not "by searching find out God." The fallen race were conscious, indeed, of hostility to their Creator; but, when asked to indicate the way of reconciliation, reason's boasted oracle was speechless. Man felt the divinity stirring within him; but whether his ethereal spirit was to perish with its sister clay, or survive "the wreck of matter and the crush of worlds," was a problem insolvable by humanity. No exertion of mortal intellect could bring "life and immortality to light."

For thousands of years the aching and bewildered soul was lifting up its piercing and frantic cries to heaven for illumination and help. The whole creation groaned and travailed in pain together.* Yet did the fallen creature, in his lowest estate, bear marks, "like archangel ruined," of his pristine grandeur. That Jehovah should have provided by special revelation for his original physical wants, and yet make no provision for his subsequent spiritual necessities, intense as they were, is a supposition opposed to that reason which infidelity idolatrously worships as a goddess, and derogatory,

* Romans viii. 22.

we speak it with reverence, to the infinite goodness of Him who has arrayed the lilies of the field, and provided food for the young ravens. The primeval revelation from heaven registered in the book of nature, was the first act of a series ; it was the sure precursor of more glorious revelations to come. The grand drama of God, exhibited to an astonished universe, would lose its completeness by subtracting, as uninspired, a single line from the Old Testament or the New. Man's miraculous preservation in his pristine state was the visible commencement of the divine drama ; its sublime consummation was developed by the miracle of his redemption.

Nor must the general belief of the pagan world before the birth of Jesus Christ, that moral light was about to dawn from above, be passed over in silence. Socrates, sometimes called the almost christian, deplored in his dying hour his want of spiritual vision, and encouraged Plato and his other weeping disciples to expect in patience a revelation from heaven. The heathen Suetonius declares ; "It was an ancient and constant opinion, and founded upon the knowledge of some divine decree, that a person or persons would appear in Judea, who should obtain the government of the world." Tacitus observes ; "It was the persuasion of most an-

cient persons, that the olden books of the priests contained passages which implied that the East would become powerful, and that there would arise in Judea those who should achieve universal empire." It is manifest that Virgil, in his fourth eclogue, had some glimpses of "the day's spring from on high." These cherished hopes might have been suggested by the inspired oracles of the Jews; but the suggestions found a ready and deep response from the smothered divinity breathed by the Almighty into the human breast.

CHAPTER IV.

THE THEOLOGY OF THE GOSPEL.

Works of God and of man distinguishable by inspection—Whether God or man made Gospel is determinable by its internal evidence—Moral attributes of God not discoverable by reason—Yet reason perceives divine truthfulness of their delineation in Gospel—Style of Bible—Atonement beyond mortal contrivance—Yet when revealed, reason must recognize it the work of God—The Trinity—A mystery too profound and startling for impostors to have incorporated into work of fiction.

THERE is a contrast between the works of God and the works of man, which plainly distinguishes the divine from the human. Raise your meditation to the system above us, with its central sun, and wheeling orbs. How symmetrical! How simple! How majestic! How changeless! How adapted in all its variegated parts to the perfection of its stupendous whole! Then sink your contemplation to the proudest work of man. How diminutive! How imperfect! How indicative of the little shifts of artifice! How prone to derangement, to the vicissitudes of change, and to the decrepitude of age! Each aspect of the visible heavens bears on its face the impress of divinity.

Nor are the sublunary works of God less distinguishable from the works of his creature. It requires no elaborate study to discover that the house is the production of mortal hands, and that the Architect of the mountains is He who hath weighed them "in scales, and the hills in a balance." The bridge that spans the stream is palpably of human structure; the flowing stream below proclaims the workmanship of Him who makes "rivers in the desert." Earth's petty master claims as his own the curiously-wrought watch; but the observer perceives at a glance that it is the pencil of the Almighty which paints the lilies of the field. God imitates not the works of mortals; nor can the barrier between the human and the divine be passed by the brother of the worm. To the authorship of the meanest production of omnipotent power mortality dare not lay claim; nor will the loftiest production of manhood rashly contend for heavenly origin.

What God has made and what man has made, is a question of great simplicity and easy solution; it requires not the invocation of extraneous proofs; it is tested by its internal evidence. To this rule, boundless as the realms of nature and of art, can it be that the Gospel is a lonely exception? Is it

the only thing that does not demonstrate its own paternity? Of all the works of God and of man, is it the isolated production whose authorship cannot be ascertained by inspection? We deny that the Gospel presents such a strange anomaly in the visible universe. Its diligent, honest and candid explorer can no more doubt its divine origin than the astronomer can doubt that the worlds are the creations of Jehovah.

In addressing his heavenly Father the psalmist piously exclaimed, "Thou hast magnified thy word above all thy name."* If this exclamation be true, the divine hand must be deeply engraved upon the holy pages. God has magnified his Word above his other works by specially impressing upon it the image of himself. Historic corroborations are satisfactory and useful to the investigation of the christian evidences. Yet they form but the out-works of Sacred Truth. The glorious Citadel of Salvation rests its claim to divinity chiefly on the symmetry, the beauty, the purity, the strength, the unearthly majesty of its own proportions. The Gospel is itself its best Advocate.

In canvassing the internal evidences of the

* Psalm cxxxviii. 2.

christian religion, the first theme that presents itself is its sublime theology. The theology of the Gospel comprises the being and attributes of God, the redemption of the world by the vicarious sufferings of Jesus Christ, and the personality and agencies of the Holy Ghost.

The Bible represents its God as a Being eternally self-existent, uniting in himself almighty ness, omnipresence, omniscience, immutability, inflexible truth, infinite holiness, infinite justice, and infinite love. This assemblage of perfections is unquestionably the most stupendous exhibition ever presented to human view. Yet impartial reason must perceive and admit the fidelity of the sublime picture. Even infidelity is obliged to confess that the Jehovah of the Bible is just such a Deity as the universe required for its creation, preservation and government. Unbelief, unless sunk to the grade of atheism, will not venture to deny that the Scriptures have faithfully delineated the true and only God of nature. In the august representation there is nothing to subtract, nothing to add, nothing to amend.

- The scriptural delineation of God was not drawn by mortal pencil. Reason may recognize truths when presented to her contemplation, which she

would never have originated by her own unaided efforts. A ploughman may credit the marvels of astronomy, which it required the genius of a Newton to bring to light. It would be foreign to our purpose to inquire whether, if man had remained in his primitive state of holiness, he would of himself have discovered the perfections of his Creator in their glorious amplitude. Man did not remain in his primitive state of holiness. He fell: and sin miserably dimmed his spiritual vision. By the apostasy his heart became darkened. There is a moral, as well as a physical imbecility of the intellect. Almost six thousand years have elapsed since the creation, and fallen man has never soared to a just conception of the true God, except where inspiration has shed its beams. To show the capacity of reason for advancement in the science of theism, infidelity has vauntingly pointed to the early Bramins of India, to the Confucius of China, to the Zoroaster of Persia, and to the Socrates and Plato of classic Greece. But these sages made little progress in the science of theological truth; and what little they learned was chiefly derived from the divine fountain opened by early revelation.

Reason may, by its own efforts, trace effects to

their cause, and thus infer the existence of Him who framed the worlds. It may furthermore conclude that the Creator and Governor of the universe must be almighty and omniscient. But should fallen man, without the lamp of Scripture, attempt to explore what are termed the moral attributes of the Deity, he must wander and be lost in utter darkness. What, for instance, could a sinful being know of the holiness of God? When seen in the scriptural mirror, it constitutes one of the chief of Jehovah's attributes. Next to redeeming love, it is perhaps the most stirring theme in the anthem of the skies; and the uplifted eye of terrestrial devotion ever gazes with wonder and delight on the holiness of Him who "sitteth upon the throne." But of "the beauty of holiness," carnal wisdom could learn nothing from communing with herself. Without the vocabulary of the Bible, she must have remained ignorant even of the meaning of the terms. Yet, when the volume of Inspiration reiterates the hallelujah of heaven, "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of Hosts," reason must needs yield her concurring, though perhaps reluctant response. With the Bible before her, she must perforce admit that holiness is essential to happiness; that without holiness, heaven would

be heaven no more ; that a God divested of infinite holiness would cease to be a God of infinite beatitude ; that an unholy sovereign of the universe would fill created intelligences with consternation and despair.

Infinite justice and infinite love are also perfections of Him who "inhabiteth eternity." And these are attributes with which the destiny of mortals is more especially connected. Yet fallen man could not have discovered them by the light of nature. Aside from the Bible, reason knows nothing of the attributes of God, except from their display in this lower world. She can argue of things invisible only from things that are seen. She holds no converse with the inhabitants of other spheres. Into the annals of eternity she cannot peer, without the aid of the Gospel. Limiting her views to this poor world, reason must hesitate in her conclusion, that its Governor is a being of never-sleeping justice. In his distribution of rewards and punishments, he takes not counsel of her. With the thunderbolt in his right hand, he has stood by in seeming indifference, while might has been trampling on right ever since the days of Eden. Though not a sparrow falleth to the ground without his notice, the great historic tragedy of injustice, crime,

and woe has been recklessly enacted in the face of heaven, without let or hindrance, for near six thousand years.

Nor could reason, with vision confined to earth, infer more favorably of the infinite love of Jehovah. Her native incredulity must prompt inquiries beyond her power to solve. If "God is love," why has he not caused this orb, made by his hands, and governed by his power, to remain, as it was in the beginning, "the garden of the Lord?" Whence come frightful and destroying earthquakes? Whence volcanic outbreaks, burying towns and cities in a fiery deluge? War, famine, and pestilence—are they not his willing slaves? And why are these ministers of vengeance so often sent forth to desolate the earth, if indeed "God is love?"

Eternity is the only clue to the labyrinth of time. That clue is beyond the grasp of uninspired reason. She has no syllogism in her ample storehouse, by which to prove the existence of a world beyond the grave. The renowned philosophers of classic Greece could not by searching find out

"The undiscovered country from whose bourn
No traveller returns."

Even the magnificent intellect of the Roman Tully,

so "rich with the spoils of time," was obliged to confess its inability to decide whether the immortality of the soul was a pleasing dream or a glorious reality. Before inspiration dawned, man had, in every age, and every clime, sought, as for his life, but sought in vain, to discover whether the grave is not the place of eternal sleep. His signal failure, so universal and long continued, even when aided by the lights of boasted science, demonstrates that the human intellect is not competent of itself to ascertain its own eternity. But when the Gospel superadded her voice to the deep whisperings of nature, the candid mind could not distrust the united proofs that the soul is to live forever.

It is only by the light of eternity that we can decipher and "justify the ways of God to man." The day of judgment is the true expositor of the mysteries of the divine government below. Without the comment of that august day, the exhibitions in this province of the general empire would but dimly portray the moral attributes of Jehovah. Unless the retributions beyond the grave had been palpable to the vision of the sacred writers, they would scarcely have ventured to predicate of the Ruler of the universe infinite justice and infinite love. If the authors of the Gospel were but the

fabricators of a fiction, why should they have encumbered it with a gratuitous averment, perhaps in seeming collision with the demonstrations of earth? It was the potency of truth shed abroad in their hearts by illumination from above, which compelled them to affirm that the justice and love of God are as infinite as his omniscience or almighty-ness. And even unregenerate reason must recognize and feel the reality of this sublime truth, if with meekness and candor she will lift her wondering eyes from time to eternity.

The very style of the Bible, when it portrays the attributes of Jehovah, assumes a magnificence and grandeur above the reach of mortality. As the sacred writers approach the awful theme, its divine majesty imparts an unearthly majesty to their dic-tion; the shepherds and fishermen of Judea rise to an elevation of language never attained by the loftiest genius of classic antiquity. Homer is justly esteemed the first of heathen authors, and the delineation of the mythological gods always invoked his highest powers. His nod of Jove was vaunting-ly indicated by the pagan world as its grandest specimen of the sublime. The Athenian Phidias selected the passage as the subject of his matchless statue, in which he sought to embody the fabled

god of gods. The memorable passage is thus translated by Pope :

“ He spoke, and awful bends his sable brows ;
Shakes his ambrosial curls, and gives the nod,
The stamp of fate, and sanction of the god ;
High heaven with trembling the dread signal took,
And all Olympus to the centre shook.”

With this boasted effusion of mythological sublimity, compare the following extracts from Job, the Psalms, Isaiah, and Habakkuk. We have placed the extracts in juxtaposition, that their collective and overpowering grandeur may the more readily appear.

“ He removeth the mountains, and they know not ; he overturneth them in his anger ; he shaketh the earth out of her place, and the pillars thereof tremble ; he commandeth the sun, and it riseth not, and sealeth up the stars ; he alone spreadeth out the heavens and treadeth upon the waves of the sea.”* “ Hell is naked before him, and destruction hath no covering ; he stretcheth out the north over the empty place, and hangeth the earth upon nothing ; he bindeth up the waters in his thick clouds, and the cloud is not rent under them.”†

* Job ix. 4 to 12.

† Job xxvi. 6, 7, 8.

"In my distress, I called unto the Lord, and cried unto my God. He heard my voice out of his temple, and my cry came before him even into his ears. Then the earth shook and trembled, the foundations also of the hills moved and were shaken because he was wroth. There went up a smoke out of his nostrils, and fire out of his mouth devoured ; coals were kindled by it. He bowed the heavens also and came down, and darkness was under his feet. And he rode upon a cherub and did fly, yea, he did fly upon the wings of the wind. He made darkness his secret place ; his pavilion round about him were dark waters and thick clouds of the sky."* "O Lord my God, thou art very great, thou art clothed with honor and majesty ; who coverest thyself with light as with a garment, who stretcheth out the heavens like a curtain ; who layeth the beams of his chambers in the waters, who maketh the clouds his chariot, who walketh upon the wings of the wind ; who maketh his angels spirits, his ministers a flaming fire ; who laid the foundations of the earth that it should not be removed forever. Thou coverest it with the deep as with a garment; the waters stood above the

* Psalms xviii. 6 to 12.

mountains. At thy rebuke they fled, at the voice of thy thunder they hasted away.”* “Who hath measured the waters in the hollow of his hand, and meted out heaven with the span, and comprehended the dust of the earth in a measure, and weighed the mountains in scales and the hills in a balance? Behold the nations are as a drop of the bucket, and are counted as the small dust of the balance; behold he taketh up the isles as a very little thing. It is he that sitteth upon the circle of the earth, and the inhabitants thereof are as grasshoppers; that stretcheth out the heavens as a curtain, and spreadeth them out as a tent to dwell in.”† “He stood and measured the earth; he beheld and drove asunder the nations; and the everlasting mountains were scattered, the perpetual hills did bow; his ways are everlasting. Was the Lord displeased against the rivers, was thine anger against the rivers, was thy wrath against the sea, that thou didst ride upon thine horses and thy chariots of salvation? The mountains saw thee and they trembled, the overflowing of the water passed by; the deep uttered his voice and lifted up his hands on high.”‡

* Psalms civ. 1 to 8.

‡ Habakkuk iii. 6, 8, 10.

† Isaiah xl. 12, 15, 22.

Our selection of these passages from the Jewish Scriptures ought not to be regarded as a deviation from the direct line of our argument. The union between the Old Testament and the New is indissoluble; and any internal proof of the inspiration of "The Law and the Prophets," tends to confirm the internal evidences of the inspiration of the Gospel.

The redemption of the world by the vicarious sufferings of Jesus Christ, is a vital element of Gospel theology. The incarnation of the second person of the Trinity is, doubtless, the greatest prodigy the universe ever beheld. Compared with this wonder of wonders, the other miracles recorded in the Gospel, such as the healing of the sick, the control of the angry elements, and the resurrection of the dead, lose their resplendence, as "the stars hide their diminished heads" in the presence of the sun. It is not to be disguised that the immolation of an incarnate God for human sin was an event well calculated to awaken the incredulity of the natural heart. We need not be greatly surprised that it appeared "unto the Jews a stumbling-block, and unto the Greeks foolishness." Its seeming impossibility has been the stronghold of infidelity for eighteen centuries. And there are twilight moments when even the faith of the pious chris-

tian is ready to falter and to faint, as he attempts to grasp the stupendous thought of having been purchased by the blood of God.

The astounding tale of the descent, incarnation, sufferings and death of the coeternal and coequal Son of the Highest, would not have been admitted into a work of fiction, fabricated by adroit impostors, and wearing the name of truth. If the Gospel is a fable, the attribute of matchless skill must be freely awarded to its authors. If it is not the inspiration of God, it looks down from its "bad eminence" of deceit and hypocrisy, as from a mountain height, upon all the other efforts of the human mind. It is almost equally miraculous, whether viewed as a divine or as a mortal production. Hell is not too deep, nor heaven too high, nor earth too broad for its grasp. It scans time as a speck in its horizon, and is familiarly at home in the bosom of eternity. With an unfaltering hand it delineates the attributes of "the unknown God," and the picture bears on its face the indelible stamp of verity. It dissects the moral anatomy of our being, as its material structure was never laid open by the scientific knife. "Know thyself," was an abstract proverb of Grecian wisdom. "Examine yourselves," is a mandate of the Gospel, not

left by her as a cold abstraction. She holds up to man a glass in which are presented his spiritual form and features, large and true as life. In the mirror of the Gospel he may study the secrets of his own nature better than in the multitudinous libraries of classic learning.

If the Gospel is a fable, the great artificers who fabricated it must have been profoundly intimate with the principles of our common being, and with the long-established laws of fiction. They well knew that verisimilitude is vitally essential to such fictitious writings as would assume the passport of truth, and that, to gain even a temporary mastery over the pride of intellect, falsehood must needs dissever itself from improbability. Even the poetic muse, with all her license and all her witchery, must, to maintain her sway when she gives "to airy nothing a local habitation and a name," array her fairy thoughts in the counterfeited semblance of truth. Would she dally with the understanding, and for awhile beguile its faith, she must not insult it with wanton infractions of common-place probability. If the writers of the Gospel had sought to be the authors of a theological romance, they need not have startled the native skepticism of the human heart by calling down a God from his throne.

It was not necessary for the success of the romance, that its hero should be the second person of the Trinity. A perfect man, or an angel exalted as far above Gabriel as he is above mortality, might have been presented as the preacher and pattern of a loftier faith and purer code of ethics than time had before known. Thus modified, the spiritual fable might have been accommodated by its matchless authors to the prejudices of the Jews and to the pride of the gentiles. The phantom bark might have been sent along the flood of time, impelled by the favoring breezes of human passion, and the current, deep and strong, of the carnal heart.

It was not the caprice of man, but the almighty-ness of truth, which imparted to the scriptural scheme of redemption the seemingly incredible mystery of its vicarious sacrifice. Had the Gos-pel been a fiction, it would not have been made to rest on the miraculous conception of the Son of God, his manger-birth, his servile toil, his abject poverty, his bloody sweat, his voluntary submis-sion to scoffings, scourgings, spittings, and igno-minious crucifixion. Borne down by such apparent impossibilities, fiction must have sunk under its own weight, as the stone sinks in the waves, unless sustained by a succession of corroborative miracles.

And its authors could not have imagined that the God of truth would suspend or vary the fixed laws of His empire to authenticate a cunningly-devised fable. Yet the Gospel confidently predicted its speedy and wide diffusion. Had twice ten years rolled away without a multiplication of proselytes, it must have fallen a victim to its own falsified predictions, and overwhelmed its fabricators with the contempt and vengeance of an insulted and infuriated world. The authors of the Gospel were either inspired or mad. Its very improbabilities confirm its truth.

Heathen mythology represented, indeed, that its fabled gods sometimes assumed the form and habitations of men. But such transformations had not self-immolation for their object. Classic fable never pretended that any of her deities descended to earth and borrowed the garb of humanity, merely to suffer and to die. The crucifixion of the "Lord of glory" was an original conception of the Bible. Should the legendary lore of the olden time have intimated that the Olympic Jove, or the Hindoo Vishnu, had arrayed himself in flesh, and lived, and suffered, and died, as the Gospel affirms that its incarnate Jehovah lived and suffered and died, the conceit would have been held too extravagant for

the indulgent faith of pagan Greece, or even for the passive credulity of oriental climes.

But although the incarnation of the uncreated Son would not have been devised for a fiction claiming to be true, and intended for general diffusion and belief, yet if reason will study the sacred theme by the scriptural lamp, with the diligence, fidelity and candor bestowed upon the sciences of earth, she must perceive in the Gospel scheme of salvation "the power of God and the wisdom of God." Enlightened by the rays of the "Sun of righteousness," she cannot withhold her credence to the tremendous truths that God is infinitely holy and just, as well as infinitely merciful; that the human race, with souls immortal, are at enmity with their Creator; and that such enmity, if continued, must inevitably draw upon them eternal perdition. Then how could infinite love receive into its bosom sinful and polluted creatures without staining the purity of infinite holiness and infinite justice? This is a problem which earth could never have solved; but earth, divested of her prejudice and pride, may see and admire the wisdom of the heavenly solution.

That God could not forgive iniquity without adequate satisfaction, is a scriptural truism which

reason might, perhaps, have inferred from the light of nature. The capricious pardon of offences would shake the pillars even of earthly jurisprudence. How much less compatible would it be with the unchangeable jurisprudence of heaven! Suffering is the appropriate penalty of sin. If offenders are to be delivered from the penalty, their deliverance can only be effected by the vicarious suffering of a sinless substitute. But where was to be found a sinless substitute of adequate dignity to atone for the iniquities of a world? The vicarious sufferings of an insect of the field, and the vicarious sufferings of legions of archangels would have been alike inefficacious. Nothing but the expiatory agonies of an incarnate God could have satisfied the awful justice of an offended God. Love prevailed, known only in the pavilion of the Trinity. Its second glorious person made himself the voluntary substitute for transgressors. Man had rebelled, and God forgave. On Calvary was displayed the resplendent rainbow of divine perfections, blending in ineffable harmony infinite justice, infinite wisdom, and infinite love. On this phenomenon of the universe, "new and strange," in the flight of never-beginning ages, the hierarchies of heaven will ever gaze with holy curiosity, wonder, and delight.

Uninspired reason would never have soared on its own wings to the mighty thought of the incarnation and sufferings of the Creator of the worlds. In exploring the human heart, it could have found there no pulsation prompting the conception of that love which brought down to earth the Son of God to die for his enemies the death foreshadowed by the bloody sweat of Gethsemane. Reason must, indeed, admire the salvation proclaimed in the Gospel, as the astronomer admires the spangled heavens ; but reason could no more have contrived that salvation than the astronomer could have formed a star.

The personality and agencies of the Holy Ghost constitute the third department of evangelical theology. The union of three divine persons in one God, each entitled to the adoration of the universe—each self-existent, eternal, omnipresent, omniscient—is the most incomprehensible doctrine of our holy religion. Though to the believer unspeakably precious, this primary article of evangelical truth has ever been to reasoning pride “a rock of offence.” Unitarianism was from the beginning the besetting heresy of Christendom ; and it threatened for centuries to swallow up the true faith. Aware of the repugnance of the human mind to

give credence to what it cannot comprehend, the Arabian deceiver, though he professed belief in the inspiration of the Bible, repudiated the doctrine of the Trinity, and thus facilitated the triumphs of the Koran over kingdoms and continents. Had the Gospel been a fable, its fabricators would not have made the plurality of the persons of the Godhead a prominent article of their creed. It was the inspiration of heaven, and not the craft of earth, that announced the existence, and commanded the equal and undivided worship of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, One in Three, and Three in One. The startling mystery would have been eschewed by the cunning of adroit impostors, combined to give wide currency to a fiction which arrogated the character of truth. The agencies of the Holy Spirit, in the work of redemption, will constitute the subject of a future and distinct chapter.

CHAPTER V.

THE MORALITY OF THE GOSPEL.

Gospel system of ethics like solar system in fewness and simplicity of its principles—Consists in love to God and love to man—Regulates thoughts and intents of heart—Disclaims heroic virtues—Places humility in front rank of its graces—Has chivalry of its own—Paul and Julius Cæsar contrasted—Other evangelical graces—Forgiveness of injuries—Universal beneficence—Victory over world—Sanctions of Gospel.

THERE is a striking analogy in their simplicity and grandeur, between the moral and the physical works of the Creator. How symmetrical, how majestic, are the movements of the planetary spheres ! And yet they are impelled and governed by two very simple principles ; the discursive, technically called the centrifugal force, and the attraction of gravitation ; the former urging them onward into the regions of space, and the latter causing them to revolve harmoniously round the central sun. Principles equally limited in number, still more simple in character, and intelligible as daylight to the intellect of early childhood, form the ruling elements of the Gospel system. “ Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul,

and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it; Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.”*

Thus did Jesus Christ declare that love to God and love to man were the two constituents, potent yet simple, of his divine system; the love to man being its discursive force, and the love to God its gravitating power; the former expanding the soul into general philanthropy, the latter drawing it home to the central Sun of righteousness. Had not “sin marred all,” the love to God and the love to man would have preserved the same sublime harmony in the moral system that the propelling and the attractive forces have produced in the physical. But sin was a malign comet, loosened from its orbit, and carrying in its lawless track dismay and destruction.

The obligation of supreme affection to the Creator and Governor of the universe was developed by the Gospel and her Jewish predecessor. It lay not within the ken of the uninspired intellect. Fallen reason could no more have discovered it in all its

* Matthew xxii. 37, 38, 39.

bearings, than the naked eye could have discovered the existence and energies of physical gravitation. The material telescope was necessary for the one discovery ; the scriptural telescope for the other. The light of depraved nature failed to ascertain the perfections of the true God. How then could it have ascertained the obligation of the creature to love him with all the heart, and with all the soul, and with all the mind ? The very multifariousness of the heathen divinities precluded the possibility of concentrated affection for any one of them. Athens recognized thirty thousand false deities. Hence the prevalent saying that, in the city of Minerva, it was easier to find a god than a man. The saying might have been of Egyptian origin ; but it found a congenial domicil in classic Greece.

Yet since Revelation has unfolded the being and perfections of the true God, even fallen reason must perceive and admit the obligation of loving him with supreme devotion. The Creator justly claims the homage of his rational creatures ; and the interchange of love between him and the intellectual emanations of himself is the silken cord, stronger than chain of iron, which should bind together the diversified ranks of spiritual being. There is a transforming power in love. Even love to the

creature assimilates us to the object beloved. Love to God restores to the renovated soul the image and likeness of its Creator, which sin had defaced. If the philosopher or patriot would elevate to its true standard the dignity of human nature, let him press home the obligation of the first and great commandment of the Gospel. Love to God is the food on which angels feed ; and if it universally became the spiritual aliment of earth, it would transmute mortals into the similitude of the cherubim and seraphim.

“Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself,” was a mandate promulgated by the Gospel. It was unknown to the heathen world. Before the great moral Luminary appeared above the horizon, self was the ruling god of this world. Poetry decked with her own never-fading wreaths the brow of the idol. The immortal heroes of the Grecian and Roman epic were just as selfish as was the Stygian hero of Milton’s Paradise Lost. Even history has condescended to hide the idol’s deformity under dazzling appellations. It was selfishness that moved Alexander to conquer the world, and then to weep that he had not another world to conquer. It was not to save his country, but to serve himself, that Cæsar passed the Rubicon. Yet has history

baptized the ambition of conquerors with the name of heroism ! It is a baptism of blood.

The Gospel held no dalliance with idolatry in any of its modifications. It commanded selfishness to pluck out its right eye, to cut off its right hand. It said to the ruling god of this world, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." It interdicted not a moderated self-love. On the contrary, it declared, "if any provide not for his own" he "is worse than an infidel." But it required that love of self and love of human kind should be regulated by the same just standard. Selfishness is but the synonyme of sin. For its own gratification it would scatter through the universe "fire-brands, arrows, and death," and in the midst of the ruins would cry, "Am I not in sport?" It once attempted to demolish the eternal throne. Satan was the father, and is the mirror of selfishness. Let the idolaters of self contemplate his hideous lineaments, and behold themselves as in a glass.

The name of selfishness survives in heaven only as a beacon to check the incipient movements of forbidden desire. Angels love their fellows as themselves ; and so should mortals love their neighbors. And the evangelical meaning of the term neighbor embraces the whole human family.

Should all of terrestrial birth yield cordial allegiance to the second, as well as to the first great commandment of the Gospel—should selfishness in all its forms be dragged forth from its hiding-places and sacrificed upon the altar of universal philanthropy, what a change would pass over the moral aspect of our world! The clangor of war would be hushed; the breath of slander ride no longer “on the posting winds;” the descendants of the primitive pair would become brethren in affection as well as in lineage; and earth would bloom again into its original Eden.

The two great commandments of the Gospel are “like unto” each other; their similitude is affirmed by their divine Author. Love is their common lever; it is the impulsive principle by which the Gospel moves the world. Even religion is nothing without love. Though it has the gift of prophecy, and understands all mysteries and all knowledge, and has faith so that it could remove mountains; though it bestows all its goods to feed the poor, and gives its body to be burned; yet, without love, it is “as sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal.” Love is the soul of the universe. God is Love and Love is God. It was Love that formed the worlds and peopled them with intelligent

beings capable of worshipping and serving their Creator. When man had fallen, it was Love that achieved his redemption; it was Love that sweated forth blood in the garden; it was Love that hung suspended, a voluntary victim, upon the cross.

In his palmy state of primeval innocence, man was love. Made in the image and after the likeness of his Creator, love was the controlling element of his nature. As God is love in infinitude, man was love in miniature. But the poison of sin transmuted into idolatrous selfishness his originally pure and expansive affections. It was the benign object of the Gospel to restore the predominance of holy love in the human bosom. Hence its two great commandments, comprising within their ample purview the whole compass of mortal duties. In love to God and love to man consists the entire system of evangelical ethics.

The Gospel's mighty lever is original and unique. Equally original and unique is the locality of its influences. Civil legislation aims only at the outer man. It aspires not to cleanse the turbid fountain within. The legislation of Jesus Christ grapples with the heart. It regulates "the thoughts and intents." It was the heart that the fall contaminated; it is the heart that the Gospel seeks to cure.

Jesus Christ "knew what was in man;" He was profoundly skilled in the spiritual anatomy of the being made by his own hands; He well understood that the heart holds the same central position in our moral system as in our physical; that in both it is the spring of action—the citadel of life. He declared, "Out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies: these are the things which defile a man."* And of external sanctity, covering spiritual corruption, He affirmed that it was "like unto whitened sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones and of all uncleanness."†

The morality of the Gospel is a new edition of the law of Sinai, revised, interpreted, and expanded by its author. "Thou shalt not commit adultery," was thundered forth from the quaking mount. The Gospel brought home to the very citadel of life Sinai's awful mandate, "Whosoever looketh upon a woman to lust after her, hath committed adultery with her already in his heart." From the great fountain of the heart, poisoned by sin, flow all the impure torrents and rivulets of human ac-

* Matthew xv. 19, 20.

† Matthew xxiii. 27.

tion and thought. Into this reservoir of pollution the Gospel casts its healing medicines. The omniscient Physician never forgot that the purification of the fountain was the only appropriate means of purifying the streams.

Frigid will ever be that system of morality, which

"Plays round the head but comes not to the heart."

Necessarily cold and inefficient must be a code of ethical abstractions deriving no warmth from the affections. Holy love, shed abroad in the soul, can alone secure the faithful performance of all the social and religious duties. The moral lever of the Gospel fails not, like the lever of Archimedes, for want of a place whereon to stand. It is self-poised on its own sure foundations of love to God and love for man.

The contrast between the practical operation of heathen ethics and of the ethics of the Gospel, shows that the source of the one is terrestrial, and that the source of the other must be divine. What has the code of polytheism ever achieved for the reformation of humankind? Yet within the first half-century of its existence the faith of the carpenter's Son accomplished a moral revolution of the

world, no less miraculous than his healing the sick, controlling the elements, and raising the dead. "See how these christians live"—"See how these christians die"—were appeals to infidelity by the infant church, perhaps more heart-touching and efficient than any of its ordinary signs and wonders. Even the unbelieving Gibbon admits and affects to eulogize the sanctity of the primitive faithful; and assigns that sanctity as one of his five causes of the Gospel's early and astounding spread.

Christianity disclaims what are called, in classic language, the heroic virtues. Among these alleged virtues is ranked the love of fame. It was the most stirring impulse of heathen antiquity. To the good opinion of his fellow-mortals, the christian is not indifferent. Yet thirst of earthly renown cannot become the absorbing principle of him who aspires after "a crown of glory that fadeth not away." Revenge was a passion of the pagans, sanctioned by the example of their gods. It was the choicest beverage of unbaptized humanity. More unrelenting than death, it often wreaked its vengeance on the dead. Homer's Achilles, though, perhaps, a fictitious character, was drawn by the hand of a master in strict accordance with the sentiments of heathen antiquity. It offended not the

taste of refined Athens, nor that of chivalrous Rome. Yet the Achilles of Homer, in the very eye of parental and conjugal affection outraged and frantic, dragged at his horse's heels round the walls of Troy, the lifeless body of his gallant rival. How hostile is the passion of revenge to the ethics of Him, who laid down his life for his enemies! Martial heroism stood at the very head of heathen perfections. Adulation pursued the blood-stained footsteps of the conqueror while he lived; and when he had waded through slaughter to the grave, the voice of millions raised him to the skies, and worshipped him as a god. But martial heroism found no place in the peaceful ethics of the cross.

Our limits allow not a detailed examination of all the christian graces. We can but glance at a few of them. And as we approach the lovely group, our eyes repose with complacency on humility's modest and retiring form. "Blessed are the poor in spirit," was the first of the beatitudes of the mount. The great Schoolmaster, who taught by example as well as precept, was himself "meek and lowly in heart." Humility had no place in the ethics of polytheism. The unpretending virtue would have been deemed pusillanimous by classic antiquity. It is a flower uncongenial to earth; its

native soil is heaven; it was transplanted into our sphere from the skies. No pagan sage would have incorporated into his ethical code the injunction, so opposed to the impulses of the natural heart, "Whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also."

But even reason, when enlightened by the lamp of Revelation, must perceive that humility is an appropriate and primary element in a moral system whose centre is the Sun of righteousness. Supreme love of God must be preceded and accompanied by the knowledge of his perfections. And who can steadfastly contemplate the glorious perfections of Jehovah, without a deep sense of self-abasement? Job exclaimed, "I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear; but now mine eye seeth thee; wherefore I abhor myself and repent in dust and ashes."* Humility increases in the soul, in exact proportion to its increase in the knowledge and love of Him who governs the universe. The saint in heaven is doubtless humbler than the saint on earth. In the ascending ranks of angels and archangels, of cherubim and seraphim, of principalities and powers, we may believe that humility augments with each

* Job xlvi. 5, 6.

successive grade of the ascent, from the subaltern spirits that watch the celestial gates, to "Gabriel" that stands "in the presence of God." And if pride is abhorrent to a holy creature who has never swerved from his "first estate," how unbecoming must it be to a fallen sinner, rescued from perdition by the free and sovereign grace of God!

The heroism of the Gospel claims brotherhood with its humility. There is a christian as well as a martial chivalry. Truthless is the taunt of infidelity, that the faith of the cross, though it may have produced martyrs, never produced heroes. True heroism consists in the dedication of the soul to some lofty and worthy object, and its undeviating pursuit of that object in defiance of privations, hardships, dangers, and death. In all these attributes of greatness, the primitive heroes of Christianity looked down, as from a celestial elevation, upon the warlike heroes bodied forth in profane history and classic fiction.

Take as an example, the tent-maker of Corinth. Compare the chivalrous Paul with the mightiest of the Cæsars. Both excelled in extent of mental attainments, in glowing eloquence, in loftiness of imagination, in profoundness of intellect, in undaunted intrepidity. But here ceased the simili-

tude. Julius worshipped self as his only god. Paul was the devoted, the disinterested worshipper of Him who "sitteth in the heavens." He of Rome sought

"To wade through slaughter to a throne,
And shut the gates of mercy on mankind."

He of Tarsus untiringly strove, at every personal sacrifice, to conduct a fallen race to the portals of paradise. The writings of Cæsar abound in startling egotisms. Paul rarely indulged in holy boasting. But he ever gloried in sufferings of which unsanctified humanity would have been ashamed. "Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods; once was I stoned; thrice I suffered shipwreck; a night and a day have I been in the deep; in journeyings often; in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness."*

* 2 Corinthians xi. 24-28.

Had not this thrilling account of the tent-maker been true, its falsity would have been detected and exposed by the Corinthians, to whom it was written, and who were intimately acquainted with the biography of the writer. His stoning, his shipwrecks, his weariness and painfulness, his hunger and thirst, his watchings, fastings and nakedness, his perils of water and of cold, of robbers, of his own countrymen, of false brethren, and of the heathen, of the city and of the wilderness, we pass over without special comment; for they did not necessarily imply disgrace. But the champion of the cross was thrice beaten with rods; five times received he forty lashes save one. These inflictions left stains more corroding than their wounds: they have immemorially been assigned as the ignominious punishments of the basest crimes. The unregenerate brave have sometimes sought

“The bubble reputation even in the cannon’s mouth.”

But nothing save the heroism of the Gospel ever voluntarily and repeatedly encountered the felon’s stripes.

Forgiveness of injuries is another constituent of evangelical morals. It is a duty urged in the Gospel with peculiar emphasis. “If ye forgive men

their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you; but if you forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses."* "And his Lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors till he should pay all that was due unto him; so likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses."† In the form of prayer taught by our Lord, we are commanded to say, "And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors." Thus our petition to God for the forgiveness of ourselves is based on the express condition that we forgive our enemies. How can this daily prayer be uttered without palsyng the tongue of the suppliant, if his own heart remains unforgiving and relentless? In this prayer of prayers, Christ assimilated the human forgiveness of injuries to the divine forgiveness of the sins of the world. The one is, indeed, a drop, the other a shoreless ocean of grace! But the drop and the ocean are kindred in nature, though differing infinitely in degree. Man becomes god-like when he imitates the pardoning attribute of God. But what sage of polytheism ever discovered

* Matthew vi. 14, 15.

† Matthew xviii. 34, 35.

and proclaimed the elemental principle of universal ethics, binding from the creation of humankind, and requiring man to forgive from his heart his offending fellows, not until seven times only, "but until seventy times seven?"

Universal beneficence is a vital element of Gospel morals. Jesus Christ represents the exercise of this virtue as the severing test between the righteous and the wicked, in the great and terrible day of final retribution. "Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was an hungered and ye gave me meat; I was thirsty and ye gave me drink; I was a stranger and ye took me in; naked and ye clothed me; I was sick and ye visited me; I was in prison and ye came unto me: Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungered and fed thee? or thirsty and gave thee drink? When saw we thee a stranger and took thee in? or naked and clothed thee? or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee? And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have

done it unto me.”* In this passage, so transcendent for simplicity, pathos and awful grandeur, our blessed Saviour singled out beneficence as the passport to everlasting bliss, not because it is the only virtue in the evangelical code, but because its habitual exercise is the sure token of the presence of all its sister graces.

The duty of christian beneficence is not confined to alms-giving. “Like the gentle rain of heaven,” its genial influences pervade the universal soil, parched and illimitable, of human wants. It has given eyes to the blind, and ears to the deaf, and a tongue to the dumb ; created hospitals for the sick, and cast its maternal mantle over the demented. It has poured its illuminating rays upon the benighted mind ; erected schools for the juvenile poor, and thrown open its colleges for the free instruction of generous aspirants after knowledge in the higher grades.

But it is in the relief of spiritual maladies that the energy of christian beneficence has been most strikingly displayed. For the salvation of souls what toils, what hardships, what “most disastrous chances” has it not joyously encountered ? After

* Matthew xxv. 34-41.

the first few centuries of Christianity had elapsed, its progress in the healing of the nations became, indeed, for a long while slow and hesitating. But on these latter times a glorious light is dawning. Princes have become "nursing fathers" to evangelizing beneficence. Commerce, its faithful hand-maiden, is whitening all the seas; wonder-working steam lends it all her potency; and the lightning of heaven has promised it her wings.

Beneficence was a stranger to polytheism. Classic antiquity had no schools for the poor; no hospitals for the diseased; no Howard for the prison-houses. She left to heartless avarice, steeled even against parental and filial ties, the lives of her helpless infants and aged. Her favorite recreations were gladiatorial murders. If she visited distant climes, it was to slaughter the doomed inhabitants, or make them slaves. With the mighty hope of renovating a fallen race her bosom never glowed.

The Gospel commands us to overcome the world. The conquest enjoined is not like that to which Napoleon aspired, and which the son of Philip achieved. The world to be conquered is the little world within ourselves. Such victory is more illustrious than was ever accomplished by "garments rolled in blood." "He that ruleth his spirit

is better than he that taketh a city."* It was an adage of lettered antiquity, that a good man struggling with adverse fortune, was a spectacle recreating even to the gods. But man's most glorious achievement is the mastery of himself. He who by divine grace can successfully say to the stormy passions of his own soul, "Hitherto shalt thou come, but no further; and here shall thy proud waves be stayed,"† is an object upon whom, not the false gods of polytheism, but the Jehovah of the Bible, can look down with complacency.

Such conquest of self is an indispensable preliminary to the favor of heaven. The unholy desires of the miniature world within us must be reclaimed, its lusts exterminated, its strong citadel of selfishness razed to the ground, or we cannot enter into the kingdom of God. Unprejudiced reason, with the Gospel shining around her, must perceive the necessity of moral renovation here as a preparative for bliss hereafter. For how could impenitent sin commingle through endless ages with immaculate holiness? Such moral renovation was a stranger even to the dreams of heathen antiquity. Her ferocious warriors she sent to elysium red from the

* Proverbs xvi. 32.

† Job xxxviii. 11.

fields of their wanton and murderous slaughter ; her profligate kings and emperors she transformed to deities when earth could no longer endure the burden of their presence.

The sanctions of the christian code bear evident marks of heavenly lineage. By the sanctions of a law are meant its rewards for obedience, and its penalties for transgression ; the former called remuneratory, the latter vindictory. An edict without sanctions is but naked advice; its obedience or disobedience depending on the volition of those to whom it is addressed. Human sanctions rely for their efficiency upon extraneous proofs ; without the aid of auxiliary evidence, they must remain utterly powerless, especially in the vindictory, which is their principal department. In a land filled with all the complicated machinery of courts and of prisons, transgression may walk in triumph, if, by the stealthiness of its steps or the adroitness of its disguises, it can lull the inattentive ear and beguile the unsuspecting eye. Even where the evidence of guilt is clear, municipal sanctions are often eluded by flight, and sometimes resisted by force. They penetrate not the secret chambers of guilt; the hidden springs of crime are beyond their grasp ; they enter not the deep and dark laborato-

ries of the heart; they reach not beyond the brief span of mortal life.

The sanctions of the evangelical code pervade the innermost "thoughts and intents." None can resist them by force, or avoid them by flight, or elude them by craft. They invoke the hopes and the terrors of eternity. They require the aid of no extraneous proofs. The omniscient eye, doth it not see? The omnipresent ear, doth it not hear? The omnipotent arm, who can withstand? The Book of God's Remembrance, who will gainsay? That dread Volume records even the most secret aspirations of unembodied guilt; and there are registered each widow's mite cast into the treasury of benevolence, and every cup of cold water given to any of Christ's little ones in the name of a disciple.

The Judgment of the Great Day is the most awful conception that ever dilated the human mind. How puerile, how despicable, were the tribunals of heathen gods, erected by classic polytheism for the sentence of departed spirits! Yet were they decked with all "the pride, pomp, and circumstance" which the uninspired imagination could conceive. The Judgment Scene of the Gospel is an original delineation achieved by no mortal pencil. Without

divine teachings, it was impossible that in representing the award of final retributions to human kind, the unlettered fishermen of Galilee should so immeasurably have transcended, in simplicity, in pathos, in unearthly grandeur, all the imaginings of Homer, of Plato, and of Virgil. The combined skill of ages has been exercised to surround terrestrial courts with whatever can excite respect, veneration, or awe. Yet how do the courts of earth sink into nothingness compared with the Grand Assize of the Son of God, when he shall come to judgment on his throne of clouds, with the hosts of heaven in his train, preceded by the archangel's trump, and met by the thronging dead! Without teachings from above, the peasants of Judea could have delineated the scriptural picture of the final advent of the Judge of all the earth, no more than they could "thunder with a voice like Him."*

* Job xl. 9.

CHAPTER VI.

THE CHARACTER OF JESUS CHRIST.

Difficulty of delineating character—Especially that of perfect man—Delineation of perfect man reserved for fishermen of Galilee—They had no model—Difficulty enhanced by the fact that the Christ of the Gospel enshrined the second person of the Trinity—Infidelity gains nothing by supposing that Christ was the deceiver and his biographers the dupes—Enacting perfect character more difficult than even delineation of one—His blended meekness, lowliness, and majesty—His humiliation surpassed what mere man would have voluntarily endured or conceived—His piety—His benignity—His beneficence—Cases of Bartimeus—The sinful woman who anointed his feet—The prodigal son—His restoring Lazarus to life—His weeping over Jerusalem.

THE power of delineating character with truth and vividness, is one of the rarest attributes of genius. To this attribute the great historians of ancient and modern times are indebted for their fame. It is this almost peerless attribute which has clothed with immortality the few imaginative writers who have triumphed over the ravages of time. To create a hero and sustain his consistency in all the varied relations of life, requires a discrimination of intellect, an accuracy of judgment, and a plastic power of fancy, seldom vouchsafed to mortals. And of all fictitious characters of earthly mould,

the most difficult to draw would doubtless be that of a perfect man. In the light and shades of a mixed character, compounded of good and evil, slight inaccuracies might escape detection. But in the pure white of the portraiture of a perfect man, the slightest blemish must be palpable to sight. The successful delineation of personified perfection in the multifarious vicissitudes of life, is a consummation to which the uninspired imagination could not attain. And profane history has not, in her ample confines, a single original of immaculate excellence to portray.

The biography of a perfect man was reserved for the unlettered peasants of Judea. They had no model of terrestrial lineage to imitate. Sin had blotted out Eden. Ideal perfection was a phantom varying with climes and epochs; one thing at classic Athens, another at iron-bound Sparta, and yet another in majestic Rome. The evangelists, unless they drew from life, had nothing to guide them but the *ignis fatuus* of their own wild imaginations. Yet of their perfect man they were to form, not merely one moral picture representing him at a single point of his being, but a series of original drawings delineating his whole diversified progress from the cradle to the tomb. And they were to

draw, not for Palestine alone, but for the world ; not for their own age only, but for all the succeeding centuries of time.

The evangelical historians essayed a still bolder flight. They affirmed that their perfect man enshrined the second person of the Trinity ; that the Christ of the Gospel was the Word made flesh ; the son of Mary, and at the same time the uncreated Son of the Highest; born in a manger, and yet inhabiting the earliest eternity ; a carpenter on earth, and yet the Framer of the heavens. The illiterate peasants of Judea assumed the biography of Jehovah clothed in humanity. If the Gospel is an imposture, its authors must have originated the unearthly conception of the incarnation of Him who “thought it not robbery to be equal with God.” And this conception so much above the sphere of mortal intellect, was but the prelude to the mightier task which lay before them. They had to conduct from the manger to the cross the complex Being of their conception, and to make him speak and act and suffer, and die, as became an incarnate Deity. He was not to be represented as “the high and lofty One,” throned in heaven ; but as manifesting himself to the children of humanity as the infinite Word never manifested himself to his creatures

until he became flesh and dwelt among them. The thoughts and emotions, the language and deeds, of their original and unique Personage, were to be as original and unique as the constitution of his mysterious being. In all the varieties of his life he was to blend harmoniously the almighty and majesty of a God with the feebleness and humility of a man. The consistency of this awful Being was to be maintained with an untiring eye and unfaltering hand, in his birth, in the expansion of his youth, in the maturity of his manhood, in his arrest, trial and crucifixion. Such a picture, blending godhead and manhood, earth and heaven, with perfect distinctness and concord, could have been drawn only by the pencil of the Holy Ghost. The picture has been hung on high for the world to gaze at. It has riveted the profound criticism of eighteen centuries. No blemish in it has been found. And yet in such a picture, a blemish would be as palpable as a spot on the luminary of day.

No uninspired effort could have achieved the scriptural delineation of Jesus Christ. Mortal pencil cannot paint a God. That the delineation has so long commanded reason's profoundest homage is no proof that it was the workmanship of reason. The human mind may approve and admire what it

could never have originated. It could not have contrived the plan of the solar system; yet it may contemplate with wonder and complacency its beauty, its magnificence, its divine architecture, when revealed by the power of the telescope.

Infidelity can gain nothing by supposing that Jesus Christ was himself the impostor, and that his biographers were but the credulous dupes of deception. Such a supposition would be placing disbelief on the more hopeless horn of a desperate dilemma. If the united efforts of his biographers could not have conceived the character imputed to him in the Sacred Volume, how could he himself, if human only, have conceived it? If their uninspired humanity must needs have failed in delineating such a character, how could his humanity have enacted it in his own person without the aid of indwelling divinity? Upon the supposition that he was but a man, it is most unlikely that he should have imagined the character with which the Gospel invests him; and if he had imagined the character, it is impossible that he could have bodied it forth in consistent and harmonious action. To perform is more difficult than to conceive or to express. That without indwelling divinity, mortal man could have spoken the words, and done the deeds, and lived the life,

and died the death, predicated of Jesus Christ, is a theory involving a more stupendous miracle than any recorded in the Gospel.

The incarnate God was "meek and lowly in heart." He was born in a manger, and wrapped in its straw. He toiled for years in the workshop of Joseph. Worse accommodated in his own world than the birds of the air or the foxes of the field, the Proprietor of the universe had not where to lay his head. At his last interview with the chosen twelve, the Lord of glory rose from supper, and took a towel and girded himself, and washed the feet of his betraying and deserting disciples. Though clothed in the mantle of omnipotence, he suffered himself to be arrested, reviled, buffeted, scourged, spitted on in the face, crucified between two thieves!

Such meekness and lowliness were not creations of fancy. They pertain not to proud man even in thought. The carnal heart would deem them below the dignity of human nature. No writer of romance would have ventured to subject his chief character to the degradations voluntarily borne by Jesus Christ. Not the genius of Homer, or Virgil, of Dante, Boccacio, or Scott, could have saved from contempt and oblivion a work of fiction rep-

resenting its hero as the tame and willing recipient of scoffings, and scourgings, and spittings. But the Hero of the Gospel was a God! His voluntary degradation was too profound for humanity to have endured—for humanity to have conceived.

The incarnation of the second person of the Trinity, is the absorbing marvel in the story of redeeming love. If faith but firmly grasps that wonder of wonders, it may contemplate with less amazement the subsequent miracles of his humiliation. The privations, insults and sufferings which he so meekly bore from his lowly birth to his expiring cry, were but subsidiary to the stupendous object of his becoming flesh. It might be expected of Him who had divested himself of “the form of God” for “the form of a servant,” that his humiliation, infinite in its commencement, should have continued infinite in all its after demonstrations. In keeping with his incarnation were the swaddling clothes of the manger, the robes of mockery, the crown of thorns, the crucifixion between malefactors. With the incarnation in full view, it seems not incredible to the awe-stricken imagination, that the God made flesh should have suffered as man never suffered, and should have humbled himself as man was never voluntarily humbled.

Yet with all the meekness and lowliness of the incarnate God were harmoniously intermingled traits of majesty and of glory, which the uninspired child of humanity could no more have delineated than he could have painted to the life the arch of heaven. In all the scriptural canvass the descended Deity stands pre-eminently forth, veiled but not wholly concealed by his covering of flesh. His words and his deeds sustained his claim to oneness with the Father, and his assumption of the incommunicable name of the Old Testament, I AM. His unearthly teachings bear on their forehead the awful impress of the Godhead. Well might the multitudes have exclaimed, that "he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes." It was not the lore of earth, but the wisdom of heaven, that flowed from his lips. He wrought his daily miracles by the same unborrowed potency that said in the beginning, "Let there be light, and there was light." Of the celestial courts, he spoke with the familiar knowledge that a princely sojourner in a foreign clime might display in speaking of his paternal halls. His thrilling descriptions of the Final Judgment, surpassing in sublimity anything ever conceived by man, drew from him no elaboration of speech or pomp

of diction ; for that great event, in all its magnificence, is to be a simple exertion of his wonted almighty ness.

The originality and perfection of Christ's character will better appear from a review of some of its component elements. Our review must necessarily be brief. The glowing theme might well be expanded into a volume.

His piety was original, unique, perfect, godlike. It was not wont to display itself in ebullitions of rapture. The Saviour of the world was no fanatic ; deep, calm, wise, and practical was his devotion. Though the live-long night often witnessed on the cold mountain-top his solitary prayers, yet the return of morning ever found him restored to the busy haunts of life. He affected no aust erities, no peculiarity of dress, language or manners ; his example afforded no model for ascetic mortifications. His was the bland and cheerful holiness of God's right hand, condescending to dwell awhile on earth, full of grace and love. He mingled in familiar intercourse with the children of humanity. He came "eating and drinking ;" he mixed in scenes of innocent conviviality ; he sat down at meat with publicans and sinners. He sought no solitudes to dwell in ; he rejoiced "in the habitable

part of his earth," and his "delights were with the sons of men."*

The benignity of Jesus Christ was a distinguishing constituent of his character. We here allude, not so much to the infinitude of his compassion demonstrated in his incarnation and vicarious sufferings, as to those lesser graces, never to have been conceived by the human mind, which marked his whole philanthropic life. An atmosphere of holy love breathed constantly from his presence, as the rays of light emanate from the orb of day. In his early ministry, when first appearing as a public teacher where he had been brought up, he went into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and the book of the prophet Esaias being delivered to him, he read therefrom; "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the Gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted; to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind; to set at liberty them that are bruised; to preach the acceptable year of the Lord." No wonder that, as he closed the book, and gave it again to the minister, and sat down, "the eyes of all them that were

* Proverbs viii. 31.

in the synagogue were fastened on him." How gracious had been his words! How benignant his looks! How vast the contrast between the quiet laborer in the workshop, and the glowing teacher in the church of Nazareth!

As the incarnate God went out from Jericho, blind Bartimeus sat by the way-side begging, and cried, "Jesus, thou son of David, have mercy on me." The multitude sternly rebuked what they deemed the obtrusive importunity. An earthly prince might have passed on in careless or disdainful silence. But the Son of Mary was the personification of that mercy which "dwelleth between the cherubims." Never did a whisper of sincere prayer escape the ear of Him "who hears the young ravens when they cry." He stood still; he commanded that the sightless beggar should be called. Thus summoned, the humble suppliant renewed his importunate petition, "Lord, that I might receive my sight!" "And Jesus said unto him, go thy way; thy faith hath made thee whole." And the blind, restored to the light of heaven, joyously followed in his Saviour's train.

Jesus was sent "to heal the broken-hearted." As he was sitting a bidden guest at the table of the pharisee, a woman of the city, who was a sinner,

"brought an alabaster box of ointment, and stood at his feet behind him weeping, and began to wash his feet with tears, and did wipe them with the hairs of her head, and kissed his feet and anointed them with ointment." The pharisee cavilled in his heart that he, who assumed to be a prophet, should have permitted himself to be thus contaminated by the touch of pollution. But Jesus had come "to seek and to save that which was lost." Perceiving the secret thoughts of his host, he recounted the pathetic tokens of the woman's contrition, and then said to him in the presence of those who sat at meat, "Wherefore I say unto thee that her sins, which are many, are forgiven ; for she loved much." And instead of reminding the guilt-stained and spirit-broken penitent of her past offences, he dismissed her by kindly saying, "Thy faith hath saved thee, go in peace." How exhaustless is the fountain of redeeming love ! How exquisitely touching this heaven-drawn portraiture of pardoning grace !

The Gospel was wont to elucidate and impress its doctrines and precepts by images borrowed from nature and from life. It thus brought home its great truths to "the business and bosoms" of men, with a familiarity and power to which classic learning was a stranger. Almost at the head of

this species of sacred teachings stands the wonderful parable of the prodigal son. The seemingly hopeless reprobate shadowed forth the gentile sinner; Jesus himself was the impersonation of the forgiving father. Overwhelmed by complicated miseries, and pressed by the iron hand of famine, the long lost son at length came to himself, and penitently sought the place of an hired servant in his native halls. The keen eye of ineffable affection recognized him "a great way off," disguised as he was by tattered rags and the deep impress of sin, want and shame; the yearning parent "had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him." The fattened calf was killed; the best robe was brought forth; shoes were put upon his naked feet; the ring of love was placed upon his emaciated finger; and the home of his boyhood was made to welcome his return with gladsome sounds of music and festivity. Such is the never-failing mercy of the redeeming God! Such his patient waiting for the prodigal's return! Such his "joy over one sinner that repenteth."

Jesus "went about doing good." Lazarus was dead; he and his pious sisters had been beloved by the incarnate Deity. The great Physician drew near to the house of mourning; the bereaved or-

phans came out to meet him, attended by their sympathizing friends. The faithful Mary fell down at his feet; her companions joined in the general wail; the compassionate God "groaned in spirit and was troubled." He was conducted to the homely grave; the putrescent body had been four days dead. "Jesus wept." Even the Jews exclaimed, "Behold how he loved him." He lifted up his mandatory voice, so bland, yet so potent; death released its grasp; decay bloomed into health; Lazarus came forth; and for his loosened grave-clothes were substituted the folding arms of sisterly affection. Such was the graciousness of the Word made flesh! Yet was the resuscitation at the cave of Bethany but a faint emblem of the blood-bought renovation of a world "dead in trespasses and sins."

Jesus approached Jerusalem to suffer and to die. Yet the anticipated pangs of Gethsemane and of Calvary were absorbed for awhile in his piteous moans over the city of his executioners. When as he descended from the mount of Olives, he came in full view of the metropolis so soon to be bathed in his blood, he wept over it as he had wept over the body of Lazarus, "Saying, if thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which

belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes." And in another of the evangelists he exclaimed; "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!" Nor did the immediate pains of crucifixion chill the warm fountain of his compassion. He infused a foretaste of heaven into the heart of the penitent thief at his side; amidst his own agonies he failed not to remember his houseless mother; and with his dying breath he invoked forgiveness upon those who had nailed him to the tree.

CHAPTER VII.

THE SAME SUBJECT CONTINUED.

Wisdom of Jesus Christ—His sermon on the mount—Other cases of his unearthly wisdom—He was the patron and personification of holy friendship—His parting interview with his disciples.—His simplicity—His manner of teaching—His indifference to human fame—Silence of Gospel concerning his personal appearance.

THE wisdom of the Son of God claimed brotherhood with his beneficence. We here refer, not so much to the divine wisdom displayed in the conception of the atonement, as to those hourly demonstrations of supernatural intelligence which marked the whole terrestrial pilgrimage of the God wrapped in the mantle of humanity. Jesus Christ was without human instruction, and so were his biographers; they were the unlettered natives of a land deemed unlettered by the pride of classic antiquity. They could not, if they would, have fabricated the displays of godlike knowledge constantly exhibited by Him who spoke as mortal never spoke. “How knoweth this man letters, having never learned?” was the irrepressible exclamation of the listening

and astonished Jews. The interrogatory has been reiterated by every student of the Gospel for eighteen centuries. The intelligence of Mary's son, if not divine, was miraculous. It was not the endowment of uninspired humanity.

Contemplate the sermon of Christ upon the mount. Had the Bramins of India, the Chinese Confucius, the Persian Zoroaster, and all the learned sages of Greece, been convened in solemn conclave to digest a code of ethics and of theism, their united labors could not have approached nearer than earth approaches heaven to that compendium of the wise, the profound, the sublime, delivered by Jesus the carpenter, and recorded by Matthew the publican. What simpleness, what perspicuity of diction! What depth, what grandeur of thought! What comprehensiveness of doctrine! What pureness of morals! What developments of the human heart! What unfoldings of Jehovah's character! The place was suited to the august occasion. No earthly synagogue would have held the thronging multitudes. It was a lofty and spacious temple, "not made with hands," having for its base the mountain-top, and for its roof the skies that the divine Speaker chose as the theatre for his grand display of that Wisdom which,

"when he prepared the heavens," "was by him as one brought up with him."*

It was no mortal sage who tested in the balances of the sanctuary the widow's mite, and pronounced it heavier than all the oblations of the rich. That wisdom was not of this world, which, drawing aside the curtain of eternity, propounded to thoughtless mortals the tremendous interrogatory, "What shall it profit a man if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" When vain curiosity had inquired of him, "Lord, are there few that be saved?" the sagacity was more than human which dictated the silencing response, "Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in and shall not be able." It was not within the scope of human rhetoric to have portrayed, as He of Nazareth portrayed, the spiritual pride of the pharisee and the broken-hearted humility of the publican, when they "went up into the temple to pray." The delineation of personified benevolence in the parable of the good Samaritan, bears decisive marks of that inimitable pencil which painted "the green of the earth and the blue of the heavens."

* Proverbs viii. 27, 30.

The Jewish hierarchy pressed onward, and instructed by demoniac cunning, often sought to entrap our Saviour in his speech. With this view they brought to him a woman taken in adultery; and after reminding him of the Mosaic ordinance, which required that such should be stoned, they temptingly asked him, "But what sayest thou?"—thinking either to bring him into collision with the ancient laws of the nation, or else to expose the friend of sinners to the imputation of unfeeling severity. He, perceiving their guile, "stooped down, and with his finger wrote on the ground, as though he heard them not." But as they continued to press the inquiry, "he lifted himself up and said unto them, he that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her. And again he stooped down and wrote on the ground." They felt the rebuke of the Omniscient; and one by one they all went out, leaving "the woman standing in the midst." Resuming his erect position, he said to her, "Woman, where are those thine accusers? hath no man condemned thee? She said, No man, Lord. And Jesus said unto her, Neither do I condemn thee; go and sin no more."* With what

* John viii. 3-11.

simplicity does this scene illustrate the wisdom, as well as the mercy of the God made flesh !

Not seldom did Jesus by counter interrogatories overwhelm his treacherous foes. The chief priests insidiously asked him, "By what authority doest thou these things ? and who gave thee this authority ?" To avoid the alternative of silence or coerced exposition, he preliminarily demanded of them whether the baptism of John was from heaven or of men. The leaders of the sanhedrim were confounded by the question, which they could not parry, and dared not explicitly answer; and thus was he relieved from the obligation of responding to theirs. By means not wholly dissimilar, he eluded the snare adroitly prepared for him in the matter of paying tribute to Cæsar.

The great prophet of Nazareth was familiar with all the mysteries of our spiritual nature. To the young man in the Gospel who thought himself the personification of goodness, Jesus propounded, as the ordeal of his professed piety, the startling injunction, "Go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven, and come take up thy cross and follow me." A test, so true, yet so utterly repugnant to unregenerate humanity, adventurers, seeking to

gain proselytes to an imposture, would never have ventured to prescribe. Nothing but that wisdom which is from above would have uttered or conceived the astounding truth, "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God." And yet even reason itself, when taught by the Bible, must perceive that the change of heart, essential to qualify the idolater of wealth for communion with the pure spirits of heaven, is a greater prodigy than the passage of a camel through a needle's eye. The physical miracle might be achieved by the simple mandate of the Almighty ; the accomplishment of the moral miracle required as its preliminary the incarnation and death of the Son of God.

Repugnance to believe revealed truths has been a distinguishing characteristic of our race ever since the fall. Man sleeps for ages in heathen ignorance, or Mohammedan delusion, with little of skeptical misgiving to disturb his lethargic repose. But wherever the light of Inspiration seeks to establish its supremacy, the alarmed prince of darkness arouses himself, and insidiously sows the tares of cavil and of doubt ; and these noxious weeds spring up in the rank soil of the carnal mind with fearful luxuriance. The weakness of fallen human-

ity, and the vigilance and power of the arch enemy were well known to the omniscient Redeemer, who compassionated the doubting Thomas, and condescended to confirm his faith by the exhibition of his own pierced hands and wounded side. To the petition that the sainted beggar might be sent from the bosom of Abraham to the five brethren of the lost epicure, to warn them of their impending fate, Jesus made the father of the faithful thus respond ; “If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead.” This response, though veritable as heaven, would not have been conceived by human wisdom. Where, in all the volumes of uninspired genius, can be found sketching so graphic, so sublime, so awfully grand and appalling, as that displayed by the Galilean mechanic in the parable of the rich man “clothed in purple and fine linen,” and the beggar “laid at his gate full of sores !”

Infidelity has vauntingly objected, that in the code of the virgin’s Son, friendship is a stranger. Even the eloquent and admired Soame Jenyns affirms that friendships “in their utmost purity deserve no recommendation from this religion.” What, then, shall be said of the friendship of Jesus for the family of Lazarus ? What of his affection-

for the beloved disciple who leaned on his bosom? What of the predilections of the primitive apostles for those in whom they found a holy congeniality of temper and of taste? The Gospel soil is not unpropitious to the growth of any generous affection. "We ought to lay down our lives for the brethren," was the glowing declaration of the disciple whose heart overflowed with all the tenderest sensibilities of friendship. Jesus himself "is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother."* What but friendship for the friendless prompted him, when he was rich, for our sakes to become poor? "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." Yet was this acme of finite affection expanded into infinity when the Son of God laid down his life for his enemies!

The drama of redeeming love rose in interest as it approached its close. One of its most moving scenes was the interview between Jesus and his disciples just before his mournful visit to the garden. He fed them with the symbols of his own body and blood; the Lord and Master washed his servants' feet. As soon as the traitor had left the sacred presence, there was laid open to the faithful eleven

* Proverbs xviii. 24.

the very soul of the incarnate Deity. No longer regarding them as servants, he styled them his friends; he bequeathed to them the enjoyment of the richest jewel in his treasury, even his own priceless peace. Announcing his departure from the world, he cheered them with the assurance that he went to prepare for them mansions in his Father's house. He promised the Comforter, who should abide with them forever. The pressing remembrance of his own approaching pangs was absorbed for a time in the kindly charities of parting friendship. Thrice did he reiterate to the mourning orphans his dying mandate, that they should love one another. The interview he closed by fervent prayer, invoking blessings on those so soon to be bereaved, and on the faithful to the end of time. Such was the friendship of the friend of sinners! Where can such a parting interview be found in the annals of earthly affection?

A striking feature in the character of Christ was his matchless simplicity. His manners were simple; his style was guileless of art; he arrayed the profoundest thoughts in the plainest garb. His parables, so familiar, so unadorned, so sublimely concise and pathetic, make their way directly to the inmost recesses of the understanding, and to

the very core of the heart. What was the oratory of Demosthenes or of Tully compared to the simple, the soul-touching eloquence of Mary's Son? He delighted in the companionship of little children. When his disciples rebuked them, he exclaimed, "Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me; for of such is the kingdom of heaven." Wherein did little children resemble the pure spirits of paradise? Surely not in holiness, born, as they were, in sin. The resemblance must have consisted in their artless simplicity. It was their simplicity, then, that endeared them to the gracious Saviour. Simplicity is an attribute of heaven; and the Son of God was its personification on earth. At the creation he stamped simplicity on all his material works. The planets roll onward in simple majesty; and the flowers of the field rear their little heads in simple loveliness. Simplicity marks every page of the volume of nature; it marks, too, every page of the Volume of Grace. Their resemblance in simpleness manifests that both volumes are the offspring of one common Parent.

The great Teacher had a manner of imparting instruction, which impostors would not and could not have fabricated. Well might the astonished

people declare that "he taught them as one having authority." "Never man spake like this man," was the official report of the messengers of the chief priests and pharisees sent to arrest him. There is a wide difference between the confidence of truth and the effrontery of imposture. It was the majesty of conscious truth, bodied forth in look and voice, which carried home his glowing words to the inmost recesses of every soul. Honesty yielded them its implicit credence; incorrigible prejudice gnashed on them with its teeth; none heard them with callous indifference. He taught not by elaborated discussions; his effusions, extemporaneous and sententious, seem generally to have been prompted by surrounding scenes or passing events. His doctrines and precepts he deigned not to sustain by concatenations of argument; he deemed his own fiat their sufficient authentication. He sent forth his unpremeditated thoughts, as he sends forth the lightning of the skies, to illuminate and to strike by their own inherent potency.

A master in either of the schools of learned Athens, would have been deemed insane had he practised the mode of teaching affirmed of the prophet of Nazareth. Nor would the fabricators of a religious romance have ventured to forge such

method for its hero. It would fail in naturalness, unless we assume that the incarnation was a reality. It is only through the sublime truth that the great Teacher in the Gospel was the second person of the Trinity, that we can divest his mode of teaching of its seeming incongruities. With the eye of faith steadfastly bent upon the incarnation, we may indeed perceive that although Jesus Christ spake as never man spake, yet that he nevertheless taught and commanded just as it became a Deity clothed in manhood, to teach and to command. It was to be expected that the eternal Word made flesh would address his creatures, as he had addressed them at Sinai, in terms brief, sententious, imperative; resting for authority, not on elaborate ratiocination, but upon his own ineffable majesty. The teaching of Jesus was in strict concord with the attributes of his complex being. It was a fitting part of one harmonious whole. To believe that stupendous whole the creation of unlettered peasants, would require a stronger faith than to believe it a revelation from God.

Fictitious writings live upon the breath of popular applause. It is the element of their vitality; and if it is withdrawn, they die and become the food of worms. Imaginative authors, whether in

prose or verse, accommodate their fictions to the principles and passions of our common nature. Universal applause is the idol of their worship. The conquest of a world is as dear to them as it ever was to a martial hero. They follow public taste as the needle turns to the pole. Their plot with its episodes, their machinery, their artifices of arrangement and ornaments of diction, are all for effect. Even the epic muse bends her majestic form to the prejudices of ages and of climes. Her varied lore and her magic spells are all combined to win for herself an immortality of fame. No imaginative writer can ever aspire to renown without copious oblations upon the altars of the gods of this world.

Of fame the "meek and lowly" Jesus was not a follower; at the shrine of that goddess he offered no incense; he stooped to none of fiction's arts to beguile attention and seduce belief. Instead of conciliating the pride of the heart, he declared it the sink of sin; instead of expatiating upon the dignity of human nature, he pronounced it so fallen, corrupt, and degraded as to require for its cleansing the tears of repentance and the blood of God. The flight of time never beheld a production so utterly opposed to every passion and preju-

dice of humanity as was the Gospel of the crucified Redeemer. Nothing but the power of truth could have achieved its glorious triumphs.

There are omissions in the evangelical accounts of Jesus Christ which would not have befallen works of romance. Fiction is wont to depict the features and mien of its hero. Reserve upon these attractive themes would essentially impair its chance for popular favor. Of the personal appearance of the Son of God the Gospel is silent. For eighteen centuries his outward man has been a subject of almost painful inquisitiveness. What would not pious wealth have given for a statue or a painting of the Saviour of the world, wrought from scriptural materials by the hand of a master! The Gospel affords no such materials. It contains exhaustless food for the immortal mind; not a tittle of aliment for idle curiosity. Even upon its heaven and its hell, it maintains a sublime reserve. It powerfully, yet dimly, shadows them forth to the awe-stricken imagination, without detailing the enjoyments of the blest, or the secrets of the great prison-house of despair. This is a peculiarity which distinguishes the religion of the cross from all impostures.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE SAME SUBJECT CONTINUED.

Trial of Jesus Christ—His grandeur and humility—Incidents of his trial—Conduct of Judas—No other traitor ever induced by compunctions visitings to commit suicide—His remorse and self murder were dying confessions of the innocence and godhead of his Master—Fall and penitence of Peter—Conduct of Pontius Pilate—The crucifixion of Jesus Christ—He spoke seven times from the cross—And as man never spoke—Bad men could not have forged the character of Jesus Christ if they would—And good men would not have forged it if they could—Extract from Rousseau.

THE trial of the Son of God detailed in the Sacred Record, constitutes one of the most stupendous scenes in the drama of salvation. Such a scene could not have been delineated by the unaided efforts of the fishermen of Galilee. How artless is the evangelical representation, surpassing in simplicity childhood's most guileless tale! Yet how sublimely magnificent the conception bodied forth! The Majesty of the heaven of heavens, clothed in manhood, stands a submissive captive at the bar of an earthly tribunal! How could the human mind of itself have imagined the words and acts befitting a Being so humbled, so transcendently august?

Yet reason itself, enlightened by the Gospel, perceives, and is obliged to admit that the words and acts ascribed to the incarnate Deity were in exact accordance with the complex character he had condescended to assume.

The grandeur and meekness of the Prisoner of Pilate were mingled in ineffable harmony. He miraculously prostrated to the ground those who came to seize him. He restored the severed ear of the servant of the high priest. He announced himself to be the King of the Jews, the predicted Messiah, the Son of God, the Judge of earth. Yet was he "brought as a lamb to the slaughter." Though he wielded the thunders of omnipotence, he permitted his oppressors to spit on him in the face; they buffeted him; they smote him with the palms of their hands; they scourged him; they gave him to drink vinegar mingled with gall; they contemptuously clothed him in a purple robe, and placed on his head a crown of thorns, and bowed the knee before him in mock adoration.

It was not in humanity, with the utmost fortitude pertaining to its sphere, to have borne with unrepining patience the mockings, the scourgings, the spittings, endured by the incarnate God. The delineation of his trial, if regarded as the imperso-

nation of simple mortality, would seem strange and unnatural. Indwelling divinity is indispensable to its verisimilitude. Regarded as the impersonation of God manifested in the flesh that he might atone for the sins of the world by unearthly humiliation and sufferings, it assumes intrinsic marks of almighty truth. Thus viewed, the representation of the doings and sayings, and speaking silence of the Arraigned before Pilate, makes its resistless way to the understanding, the conscience and the heart. The events of his trial seem but the natural consequences of his incarnation. It was not to be expected that the humbled God would have humbled himself after the manner of men. When he became lowly, it was but godlike that his lowness should, in its infinitude, have resembled the infinitude of his glory.

The trial and condemnation of Jesus Christ exhibit subordinate characters and incidents illustrative of his divinity.

The treason of Judas consisted, not in acts of direct violence, but in his information to the chief priests of the time when his Master would be found in a solitary place, so that they might arrest him without danger of popular commotion. Upon learning that he was condemned, and about to be executed, the remorseful culprit went again to the

chief priests, confessed to them that he had "betrayed the innocent blood," and when they heeded him not, cast down at their feet the thirty pieces of silver, with which they had bribed him, and departed and hanged himself. The catastrophe of his unfaithfulness presents an anomaly in the history of treason. Traitors have existed in every age; but none save the betrayer of Emmanuel was ever driven by compunctionous visitings to lay suicidal hands upon himself. His despair and self-murder were not induced by the bare consciousness that he had betrayed innocent blood. Treason has often caused the death of innocence, and yet slept in callous indifference. Iscariot was urged to his fate by the maddening thought that he had betrayed not only the blood of man, but the blood of God.

The betrayer of Jesus could not have been mistaken in the character and lineage of the Betrayed. He had spent years in his immediate family; he had been the ear-witness of his doctrines and precepts, the eye-witness of his wonderful works; he had himself wrought miracles in his authoritative name. If he had only freed the world of an impostor, he might have gloried in his act. But he well knew, and despairingly proclaimed, that he

had sold the Lord of glory. The cast out devils confessed that Jesus was the Son of God. The apostate Judas reiterated the momentous confession; and his murderous hands sealed it with his own blood.

Declarations solemnly made in the immediate presence of the king of terrors, without compulsion or persuasion, at the sacrifice of character and of property, stand second in convincing power to no testimony of earthly origin. The dying declaration of Iscariot was unsolicited and voluntary; it drew after it the surrender of his thirty pieces of silver; it superadded to the abhorrence of the faithful, the contempt of the Jews. It could not have been prompted by any expectation of arresting the sacrilegious machinery he had set in motion, or of rendering more tolerable his condition in the coming world. It was a sublime and awful demonstration of the intrinsic potency of truth, bursting forth by its own volcanic force from the despairing heart. We doubt whether the last declaration of the reprobate Judas is less decisive in its confirmatory bearing on the christian evidences, than the dying declaration of the martyred Stephen, when he said, "Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God."

Infidelity can find no escape in the subterfuge, that the sacred writers may have forged the overpowering story of the betrayer of his Master. Matthew affirms that, when the conscience-smitten traitor had confessed the innocence of his victim, and cast down in the temple the thirty pieces of silver, the chief priests took up the money, and, declaring that it was not lawful to put into the treasury the price of blood, bought with the silver pieces the potter's field to bury strangers, and that the field was still called the field of blood when the evangelist wrote.

The evangelist thus subjected the verity of his narrative to the test of public monuments and history. Whether, just after the crucifixion, a cemetery had been purchased in the environs of the Hebrew metropolis for the interment of strangers; whether that cemetery had originally assumed and ever maintained the name of "the field of blood," and whether its distinctive and strongly-marked appellation had been derived from the treason of Judas Iscariot; were points upon which the twilight of peradventure rested not at the date of Matthew's publication. The truth or falsity of the alleged facts must have been known to all the dwellers at Jerusalem, when within less than a

quarter of a century after their supposed occurrence, the first of the Gospels made its appearance in that city. Many members of the sanhedrim, before which our Lord was arraigned, were doubtless then living; and its deceased members were unquestionably represented by numerous descendants ready to sustain the character of their ancestors. Vindictive hosts of Jewish and pagan opponents, bent on exterminating the new and hated faith, would eagerly invoke from the repositories of truth or calumny, and triumphantly proclaim to a deriding world, any fact or rumor tending to impeach the fidelity of the leading evangelist. Even Celsus, the heathen philosopher, who wrote elaborately against Christianity in the second century, admits, as we have already seen in a previous chapter, the truthfulness of the story of Judas, and urges, as an argument against our holy religion, that its Founder, claiming to be omniscient, permitted himself to be betrayed by one of his chosen twelve.

Peter's fall and repentance are incidents of the trial of Jesus Christ strongly corroborative of the inspiration of the Gospel. The apostolic lapse, following so closely the most vehement asseverations of enduring constancy, would not have been

likely to be introduced by unbelieving impostors into a work of fiction. It must have startled by its unnaturalness, were it not for the scriptural revelations of the deceitfulness of the heart, and the tremendous power of the prince of darkness. The unchristianized imagination would be still less apt to have devised the contrition of the apostle. Evangelical experience is a department of knowledge, in the exploration of which unaided reason could make little progress. True repentance can be portrayed only by him who has felt it. Homer could have composed the fifty-first Psalm no more than he could have searched with omniscient ken the secrets of stranger hearts. None, unless himself a penitent, could vie with the son of Jesse in the delineation of penitence. The simple, the graphic, the soul-touching words, "And the Lord turned and looked upon Peter"—"And Peter went out and wept bitterly," flowed not from the pen of a conscious and callous deceiver.

[In the trial of our Lord, the conduct and declarations of the Roman governor form memorable incidents. He was not ignorant that the prisoner claimed to be the Christ, the King of the Jews, the Son of God. Yet at the close of the trial, Pilate pronounced him a "just person," and sought to

cleanse himself, by the ablution of his hands, from the stain of innocent blood. He would not have bestowed on the prisoner that honorable and high appellation, had he thought him an errant and blaspheming impostor, deluding earth and affronting heaven by false pretensions to divine titles and attributes. Pilate must, therefore, have held that the victim of Jewish malignancy was above the grade of mortality. On no other supposition could he have pronounced him a "just person."]

The trial is replete with other circumstances corroborative of the belief of Pilate, that the accused was of celestial birth. It was this belief, and not any sentiment of compassion, that induced the hesitancy and vacillation of the profligate and iron-hearted judge. Pity never touched the unfeeling soul of Pilate. But even he stood appalled at the thought of condemning to crucifixion an incarnate Deity. Hence his reiterated appeals to the populace, pressing the innocency of Jesus, and urging them to ask his release. Hence his applications to the prisoner himself, to explain who and whence he was. Hence his effort to cast upon Herod the responsibility of an acquittal or condemnation. When the Jews recalled his attention to the avowal of Jesus that he was the Son of God,

Pilate became "the more afraid." The dream of his wife confirmed his apprehensions: and it was not until hundreds of infuriated voices had threatened the vengeance of Cæsar, in case he should dare to liberate a rival claimant to sovereignty, that he finally delivered the accused to his fate. His consciousness of official delinquencies rendered him peculiarly fearful of the scrutiny of his imperial master.

The belief entertained by the Roman judge that his prisoner was of heavenly origin, rested on reasons of pressing cogency. Pilate had for many years been procurator of Judea. He was familiar with the accounts of the wonderful works predicated of Jesus of Nazareth. He had ample means of ascertaining whether the alleged miracles were real or simulated, and could not have been mistaken in their character. If they were real, they demonstrated the divine powers of him who wrought them. If they were simulated, they proved him a public cheat. Upon the supposition of their falsity, Pilate would not have declared to the Jewish multitude, "I am innocent of the blood of this just person; see ye to it." Nor can we suppose that the responsive imprecation, "His blood be on us and on our children," would have entailed the curse

of heaven upon the whole Hebrew race for more than eighteen centuries, had the central cross of Calvary been crimsoned from the veins of a mere impostor. The mien of the accused must have inspired the Roman procurator with awe. His very look had made its way to the heart of the denying apostle. His whole demeanor was unearthly; his meekness, his patience, his silence when speaking might have saved his life, pertained not to the sphere of humanity. He acted, he spoke, he looked the God; eclipsed indeed, but not wholly concealed by the covering of flesh.

Unbelief has never, to our knowledge, attempted to impeach the evangelical accounts of the conduct and declarations of the Roman governor at the trial of Jesus Christ. At least three of the Gospels were published before the generation to which Pilate belonged had passed away. At the times of their publication, many were, doubtless, alive who had been personally present at the trial, and were hostile to the new religion. Unfaithfulness in the history of public proceedings, of such recent date and absorbing interest, would have been closely followed by exposure and indignant reprobation.

Candor is a twin sister of truth. The unaffected and inimitable candor displayed by the evangelists

in the relation of their Master's trial are strong confirmations of its verity. The outrages, which caused the quaking of the firm-seated earth, and the obscuration of the luminary of day, they recounted in language simple, ingenuous and unimpassioned. No vestige of prejudice or partiality is to be found in these narratives. The disciples of Jesus reciprocated naught of the rancor of the chief priests and elders. They stated the actings and doings of the time-serving Pilate without the slightest intermixture of vituperative comment. They left the traitor Judas to the scorpion stings of his own conscience, and, sparing of human maledictions, consigned him to the retributions of eternity.

The crucifixion of Jesus Christ was the last scene of his humiliation. It appears from the Sacred Record, that he spoke seven times after being nailed to the cross. He declared to the penitent thief, "Verily I say unto thee, to-day thou shalt be with me in paradise." He said to the weeping Mary and to the beloved disciple respectively, "Woman behold thy son;" Son, "Behold thy mother." The following ejaculations also burst from his agonized lips: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do;" "I thirst;" "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me;" "Father into thy hands I

commend my spirit ;" "It is finished." The order of his expiring declarations is not distinctly stated in the inspired pages. If these were, indeed, the last words of Jesus Christ, they prove beyond peradventure that he was not an impostor. No impostor ever spoke and died as he is represented to have spoken and died. Well might the centurion who "stood over against him and saw that he so cried out and gave up the ghost," exclaim, "Truly this man was the Son of God."*

Infidelity can elude the demonstration imparted by the scene of the cross only by the bold affirmation that it was a sheer fabrication. But how could profligate counterfeiters have conceived such a scene? Its elements were not derived from the previous realities of human life. Until the death of Christ no martyr ever prayed for his murderers. That was a prodigy to which the Gospel gave birth. The pathetic exclamation, "My God, my, God why hast thou forsaken me?" referred not to the delivery of his person into the hands of his enemies; for he had declared upon his arrest, that he could pray to his Father, who would presently send him more than twelve legions of angels. It was his

* Mark xv. 39.

spirit that was forsaken of his God. The wailing sent forth from the cross was induced, not by the scoffings or scourgings or spittings, nor yet by the lacerating irons. It was spiritual bereavement and dismay that overwhelmed the Sufferer.

If the writers of the Gospel were its fabricators, they must have been the vilest of men. But how could such men have conceived the fact that a holy being lives upon the light of God's countenance, and is cast into the depths of despair if that light is withdrawn? Such fact, though true as heaven, is beyond the sphere of mortal imagination. Had the high-reaching Plato, instead of his perfect commonwealth, attempted to portray a perfect hero of theological romance, he might have conducted him through all the trials to which flesh is heir, and finally crowned him with the martyrdom of the cross; but even his sublime fancy could not have thrown into the fable the unearthly thought that the loss of the light of God's countenance is the acme of suffering. Such a thought pertains not to uninspired and unregenerate humanity. The carnal heart knows nothing—dreams nothing—of the ineffable light of the divine countenance, and consequently nothing of the unutterable anguish caused by its loss.

The terms "It is finished," pronounced by the Sufferer on Calvary, embodied thoughts which the uninspired mind could not have grasped. They reached and pervaded infinitude. It was the Infinite who uttered them. They were the last words of the tragedy of redemption. What was "finished?" The extermination of the empire of darkness was "finished." The temple of salvation for perishing mortals was "finished." The most glorious structure ever reared by omnipotent power was "finished." The throes and agonies of the Son of God were "finished."

We have thus in the present chapter and the two which immediately precede it, sought to show that the character of the Christ of the Gospel could not have been conceived and delineated by any unaided effort of the human mind. The proofs of the position seem to be irresistible. Should, however, any timid inquirer after truth incline to believe that it is too broadly stated, it might be narrowed down, without impairing its force, to the affirmation that *bad men* could not have conceived and delineated the character. Thus modified, the position cannot but command the acquiescence of the most hesitating inquirer, unless he unfortunately fails in the article of candor. In the character of Jesus

Christ godliness is the chief element. The signification of godliness has been familiar to the christian of every age and clime. It is written on the tablet of his heart. But bad men are as ignorant of godliness as a blind man is of colors. It is not palpable to carnal vision—it is spiritually discerned. A bad man could conceive and depict the life of godliness in all its varied yet harmonious hues, including its outward demonstrations and inward exercises, no more than a man blind from his birth could conceive and depict the lights and shades of the ever-changing, ever-glorious landscape.

Had bad men, without the lamp of Revelation, formed a god for themselves, the idol of their creation would have resembled but dimly the august Ancient of Days. And had they, by the mere light of nature, attempted to form a saviour of the world, their fabricated redeemer would have borne a still less similitude to our Lord Jesus Christ. A messiah of profane fiction would have approximated scarcely in semblance the “Holy Thing” born of the virgin. It would not, like Him, have endured with meekness and patient magnanimity the sweat of labor and the sweat of blood. The offspring of human passion, pride, and malignancy must have betrayed some marks of its earthly parentage in the

palace of the high priest, at the judgment-seat of Pilate, or in the hall of Herod, with body scourged, and face spit upon, and head lacerated with the crown of thorns. It could not by mortal arts have been made to suffer and to die as the Son of God suffered and died.

We are, then, to conclude that bad men could not have conceived and delineated the character of Jesus Christ. And the conclusion is equally irresistible that good men would not have banded together to concoct and disseminate a wicked and impious imposture. That good men forged the story of redeeming love is, indeed, a supposition that infidelity has never had the hardihood to advocate. It may thus be recognized as an everlasting truth, that good men would not have fabricated, if they could, the character of our blessed Saviour, and that bad men could not have done it if they would.

We close our remarks upon the character, trial, and crucifixion of Jesus Christ, by subjoining a memorable passage from the writings of the unbelieving and profligate Rousseau. In the bosom of the Genevan philosopher was deeply implanted a sensibility to the charms of truth, which neither the blighting frosts of skepticism, nor the poisonous

influences of a dissolute life, could utterly extinguish. It burst forth from its smouldering ruins in the following sublime eulogy of the Gospel and its divine Founder :—

"I will confess to you," says the infidel associate of Hume, "that the majesty of the scriptures strikes me with admiration, as the purity of the gospel hath its influence on my heart. Peruse the works of our philosophers with all their pomp of diction; how mean, how contemptible are they, compared with the scriptures! Is it possible that a book, at once so simple and sublime, should be merely the work of man? Is it possible that the sacred personage, whose history it contains, should be himself a mere man? Do we find that he assumed the tone of an enthusiast or ambitious sectary? What sweetness, what purity in his manner! What an affecting gracefulness in his delivery! What sublimity in his maxims! What profound wisdom in his discourses! What presence of mind, what subtlety, what truth in his replies! How great the command over his passions! Where is the man, where the philosopher, who could so live, and so die, without weakness and without ostentation? When Plato describes his imaginary good man, loaded with all the punishments of guilt, yet meriting the highest rewards of virtue, he describes exactly the character of Jesus Christ: the resemblance was so striking, that all the fathers perceived it. What prepossession, what blindness must it be, to compare the son of Sophroniscus to the son of Mary! What an infinite disproportion there is between them!"

Socrates, dying without pain or ignominy, easily supported his character to the last; and if his death, however easy, had not crowned his life, it might have been doubted whether Socrates, with all his wisdom, was anything more than a mere sophist. He invented, it is said, the theory of morals. Others, however, had before put them in practice; he had only to say, therefore, what they had done, and to reduce their examples to precepts. Aristides had been just, before Socrates defined justice; Leonidas had given up his life for his country, before Socrates declared patriotism to be a duty; the Spartans were a sober people before Socrates recommended sobriety; before he had even defined virtue, Greece abounded in virtuous men. But where could Jesus learn among his cotemporaries, that pure and sublime morality, of which he only hath given us both precept and example? The greatest wisdom was made known amongst the most bigoted fanaticism, and the simplicity of the most heroic virtues did honor to the vilest people on earth. The death of Socrates peaceably philosophizing with his friends, appears the most agreeable that could be wished for; that of Jesus, expiring in the midst of agonizing pains, abused, insulted and accused by a whole nation, is the most horrible that could be feared. Socrates in receiving the cup of poison, blessed indeed the weeping executioner who administered it; but Jesus in the midst of excruciating tortures, prayed for his merciless tormentors. Yes, if the life and death of Socrates were those of a sage, the life and death of Jesus are those of a God. Shall we suppose the evangelical history a mere fiction? Indeed, my friend, it bears not the marks of fiction: on the con-

trary, the history of Socrates, which nobody presumes to doubt, is not so well attested as that of Jesus Christ. Such a supposition, in fact, only shifts the difficulty without obviating it; it is more inconceivable that a number of persons should agree to write such a history, than that one should furnish the subject of it. The Jewish authors were incapable of the diction, and strangers to the morality contained in the gospel; the marks of whose truth are so striking and inimitable, that the inventor would be a more astonishing character than the hero."

CHAPTER IX.

THE MIRACLES OF THE GOSPEL.

Miracles of Christianity internal proofs of divinity—Science of juridical evidence applied to christian history—Writers of Gospel not deceived—Miracles palpable to senses—Abiding in effects—Infallible—No collusion—Open and public—Continued for years in presence of friends and foes—Writers of Gospel had good sense and sound understanding—Deposed from personal knowledge—Paul knew with certainty whether miracles of his conversion and those wrought by himself were real—Writers of Gospel eight in number—Testimonies equivalent to judicial depositions.

THE miracles of the Gospel have been generally classed among its external evidences. We cannot perceive the propriety of that classification. Of the christian prodigies, the Gospel is the only primary record; of their reality, the evangelical writers are the only original witnesses whose depositions survive to the present day. Instead of being extraneous, its miracles constitute integral parts of the New Testament. The scriptural accounts of the sayings of Jesus Christ are universally acknowledged to belong to the internal evidences of Christianity; the scriptural accounts of the doings of Jesus Christ are testimonials alike internal. It

is the Gospel itself that proves the sublime theism and the pure ethics taught by the Prophet of Nazareth, so indicative of his divinity ; it is the Gospel itself that also proves his wonderful works, so demonstrative that he was the Son of God. The confirmations derived from foreign sources constitute the external evidences of our holy religion.

It would be irrelevant to our argument to discuss the abstract question whether a miracle must necessarily, and in all cases, verify the dogma it is designed to uphold. Such discussion would gratuitously bring under review the cases of the Egyptian magicians, and of the sorceress of Endor, with other scriptural passages seeming to countenance the existence of "lying wonders." It is enough for our purpose that the sole tendency of the Gospel is to promote the glory of God, the holiness of man, the discomfiture of the powers of darkness. For the authentication of such a system of faith and of ethics, evil demons would not work miracles if they could. It would display a "kingdom divided against itself." If genuine, the christian miracles must have been from above ; they are to be deemed the broad seals of heaven to the Gospel's truth.

The science of evidence is an important depart-

ment of human knowledge. It consists not merely of artificial rules; its foundations are deeply laid in the immutable principles of nature. It is the Archimedean machinery of juridical tribunals for the development of truth. On its due application depend property, liberty, and life. It has been the subject of assiduous culture ever since the dawn of civilization. The improvements of successive centuries were consolidated in the code of the Roman Justinian. That imperial code has descended to modern ages, the richest treasure of antiquity. The vigor of the Celtic mind has raised the science of proof to a height of perfection unattained even by the learned efforts of the former mistress of the world. In the judicatories organized under the common law of our fatherland, and especially in that department of the temple of justice dedicated to trials by jury, it forms, perhaps, the noblest system of practical wisdom of which humanity can boast. When administered by learned judges and honest jurymen, it is an almost infallible means of detecting error in all its Protean forms. The final triumph of untruth in tribunals thus constituted, is a phenomenon scarcely witnessed in a lifetime. We purpose to invoke from civil courts those principles of evidence which have been matured by the

experience of thousands of years, and to apply them to the sacred theme of the Christian miracles.

When we open the New Testament, we find it replete with marvels. "Great is the mystery of godliness," whether applied to its doctrines or to its facts. The Gospel recounts the incarnation of the Son of God; the miraculous healing of all manner of diseases; the resuscitation of the dead, and the controlling of the elements by a brief mandate; the feeding with a few loaves and fishes famished hosts. It speaks of the preternatural darkening of the sun, and rending of the rocks, and quaking of the earth; it affirms the resurrection of Jesus Christ; it proclaims the visible ascension of the second person of the Trinity, and the stupendous descent of the third; it ascribes to the early heralds of the cross the faculty, taught them in no earthly school, of speaking strange languages as their mother tongue.

In the grand issue between Christianity and unbelief, the advocates of the Gospel confessedly hold the affirmative. On them devolves what is termed in Latin the *onus probandi*, and in English the burden of proof. As the events recorded in the New Testament are extraordinary, they require to be confirmed by extraordinary evidence. Man is a reasonable being; and the Author of his mental

faculties does not exact his homage to any creed without proof of its truth. When the intellect has within its grasp due testimonials that the creed is inspired, then, and not until then, is reason bound to yield the sceptre to confiding and unhesitating faith. Let not the sensitive believer startle at the latitude of these concessions. Pure gold dreads not the crucible; the more trying the ordeal the clearer will be the demonstration of its genuineness.

We ask not the student of truth to yield credence to the christian miracles without thorough examination. We ask him to test them by the sound principles of evidence, which from time immemorial have been judicially sanctioned by the wisdom of the civilized world. Can he find a better test than those principles upon which he daily and confidently reposes his fortune, his liberty, his life? If he will apply to the miracles of the Gospel this practical touchstone, with the diligence and candor displayed by ordinary jurymen in the investigation of secular truth, he will reach the conclusion that they are the genuine seals of heaven, with a certainty of conviction not inferior to the full assurance wrought by the demonstrations of mathematics. In the present chapter, we purpose to show by the rules of proof, matured by the keen-

sighted skill of enlightened self-interest, and grown gray under the frost of ages, that the evangelical witnesses could not have been innocently mistaken in their attestation to the christian signs and wonders. In the next two chapters, we design to show that they were not wilful deceivers. From these premises clearly established, the conclusion will be inevitable that the Gospel is true. Our argument develops itself under several heads.

First.—When a witness in a civil tribunal testifies to strange events, the triers spontaneously inquire, at least in their own minds, whether the nature and character of the events, or their attending circumstances, may not possibly have beguiled the witness into innocent mistake. Man is prone to illusions; his imagination is a prolific source of error; even his graver faculties are not always faithful in their allegiance. Let the student of the christian evidences adopt for himself the spontaneous inquiry of the juridical triers, and rigidly apply it to the testimonies of the evangelical witnesses. He will find that the possibility of their being deceived was utterly precluded by the nature, character, and circumstances of the christian miracles. They could have been mistaken in the

reality of the supernatural signs and wonders no more than the eye can be mistaken in the existence of light.

The miracles of the Gospel appealed, not to the imagination, but to the senses and the judgment. Though wrought by a simple word or touch, their effects were abiding. They came, indeed, with the lightning's speed; but they passed not away like the lightning's flash. The five thousand fed by the five loaves and two small fishes were assured, not only by their sight, but also by their appeased hunger, that the miracle was no delusion. The blind, the lame, and the diseased were restored to the vigor of unfaltering health, fearless of relapse. The three dead persons, raised to life by Jesus Christ before his own decease, mingled again in social intercourse, and remained, perhaps for many years, living, moving, speaking prodigies, at which the world gazed, and wondered, and trembled.

The remedies of the mighty Physician were not experiments, sometimes successful, oftener failing. His applications were sovereign and infallible. Disease was always submissive to his mandate; never failing was his restorative touch. At his command death ever willingly yielded up its victims. Devils never refused to depart at his bidding.

He had but to speak the word, and the light of intelligence straightway shed its gladdening beams upon the minds of the demented.

To suppose collusion between the great Healer and his patients, and that they affected to be diseased that they might seem to be cured, would imply a conspiracy of thousands without motive or object, reaching through the whole time and limits of his public ministration. To such collusion neither the dead nor the demented could have been parties. And among the living and sane, the supposed confederation, bound together by no principle of cohesion, could not, if it escaped exposure by internal treason, have eluded the scrutiny of foreign foes. Witness the vigilance with which the pharisees probed the case of the man born blind, whom Jesus restored to sight by anointing his eyes with clay, and sending him to wash in the pool of Siloam. If the Jewish sanhedrim lavished thirty pieces of silver to effect the arrest of the Son of man, how profuse would have been their expenditure to secure his disgraceful detection! Had Iscariot any secret frauds to reveal, he might have become rich by the disclosure, without being driven by despair to lay murderous hands upon himself.

The miracles of Jesus Christ sought not "the

shade of guilt-concealing night," but were as open and almost as diffused as the light of day. They were publicly wrought at Jerusalem, and in every city and village of Judea. Between forty and fifty of them are named by the evangelical historians; and their oft-repeated allusion to divers other miracles not named, indicates that their aggregate number must have been almost countless. They were continued for three years, and fearlessly displayed in the presence of friends and foes. Of the wonderful works, the constituted authorities of the land were the ever vigilant, the ever hostile supervisors. The infuriated scribes and pharisees beheld, and wondered, and reviled; not daring, in the face of an astonished nation, to controvert the fact of the miracles, they impiously ascribed them to demoniac arts.

Secondly.—When a witness in a court of justice testifies to events peculiarly strange and wonderful, the questions whether he is of healthful mind; whether his evidence is based on his own personal knowledge; and whether he had sure means of accurately learning the certainty of the events narrated, will pass in careful review before the candid, discreet and intelligent triers. To the student of

the christian evidences we commend the invocation of these questions, and their close and solemn application to the testimonies of the sacred witnesses. The deeper he lays the foundations of his faith, the firmer and more immovable will be the superstructure.

The works of an author reflect his intellectual lineaments as the glass reflects the features of his countenance. In the evangelical works good sense, sound understanding and practical wisdom are predominant elements. They must, therefore, have been the predominant elements in the mental constitutions of the writers. Infidelity, in affirming that the Gospel is a fabrication, ascribes to its authors a still higher intellectual grade. If the Evangelical Record is a romance, it is the most wonderful achievement of mortal genius. If not inspired by heaven, it possesses such an earthly inspiration as never breathed forth in the pages of Homer or Shakspeare. In spite of the opposition of power and the cavils of unbelief, it has extended its moral sceptre over the whole civilized world. Its lineaments are all so godlike, that for a long course of centuries the best and the wisest of mankind have clung to it as the noblest work of God, with a faith lasting as life, and brightening even in

the dying hour. Be the Gospel a matchless fiction, or a glorious reality, it bears internal demonstration that its writers were too intellectual and clear-sighted to become themselves the victims of delusion.

In narrating the christian miracles, the evangelical writers deposed not from hearsay merely, but from their own personal knowledge. Matthew, indicated by the unanimous voice of christian antiquity as the composer of the sacred history which bears his name, was one of the apostolic twelve. John announces that he himself was the disciple who leaned on the bosom of Jesus. We believe that Mark and Luke were of the chosen seventy. Mark wrote several years after Matthew. His work appears as an original composition, founded on his own knowledge. Had it been but an abridgment of his predecessor, or the mere gleanings of hearsay, the candor of Mark would have been likely to give some intimation to that effect. Why should he have abridged the already condensed work of Matthew? Why should he have placed his hearsay gatherings in competition with the personal recollections of an original apostle? The passion of authorship found no place in the occupied mind of the holy Mark. To say that he was inspired by

the Holy Ghost would at once solve the difficulty. But that would be begging the question at issue between infidelity and ourselves.

The same remarks apply to Luke, who also wrote years after Matthew, though before John. But it has been said that the introduction of Luke's Gospel announces that he had no personal knowledge of the events which he narrates. We do not concur in this interpretation. In the first two verses of his introduction, he refers to "many" who had "taken in hand to set forth in order" the miracles of salvation delivered by those who "from the beginning were eye-witnesses." The "many" (Matthew not included) had doubtless written from hearsay, and their writings have passed into merited oblivion. In contrast to these writings based on hearsay, Luke, in the third verse, speaks of his own design; "It seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write unto thee in order, most excellent Theophilus." How could he have had a "*perfect understanding* of all things from the very first," unless he had been an eye and an ear witness of them? In the fourth verse, he declares one of his objects in writing to be, that his friend might "*know the certainty* of those things." But

how could Theophilus know their certainty from the epistle of his correspondent, unless that correspondent had himself personal knowledge of their truth? When just after the ascension, the eleven disciples selected two candidates for the apostolic office, left vacant by the treason and death of Judas, they were careful to name persons who had been followers of Jesus Christ even from the baptism of John, that one of them might be ordained to be a witness with the original disciples of his resurrection.* And was it not equally important that those who were to prepare and publish, for the benefit of cotemporaries and posterity, written attestations of his teachings and works, should have had personal acquaintance with them from the very beginning?

All the sacred biographers had, we suppose, the most ample means of ascertaining the truth of the events which they have recorded. Matthew and John belonged to the family of Jesus Christ; Mark and Luke had been followers in his train, intently gazing on his wonderful works. In the reality of those works, they could have been mistaken no more than in their own identity. It was not in-

* Acts i. 21, 22.

formation, but vision, which taught them that the blind eyes had been opened, the lepers cleansed, the fevers assuaged, the winds and the waves hushed, the devils cast out, by words of human sound but of power divine. And how could the evangelical biographers have been deceived in the resuscitation of the widow's son, of the ruler's daughter, and of the brother of Mary and Martha? They had seen the inanimate remains; the cold seal of death was not to be mistaken. They saw again the rigid limbs beginning to move; the glazed eye reanimated; the hueless cheek crimsoned with the flush of returning health. They afterwards sat at supper with the restored Lazarus, where the Jews assembled in crowds to behold one who had been raised from the dead.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ was the last act in the drama of redemption. His disciples had gazed on his crucifixion; they had beheld his hands and feet nailed to the tree; the fatal spear had in their sight pierced his side; they had witnessed his interment; the granite tomb had been watched by a guard of Roman soldiers, and sealed with the seal of the Jewish sanhedrim. Yet on the third day he appeared to his disciples in the vigor of renovated life; he showed himself alive to them and often

conversed with them for forty successive days ; he displayed to them his wounded hands and pierced side ; their eyes saw him, their ears heard him ; their hands handled him ; he wrought miracles in their presence ; at the end of the forty days they beheld him ascend to heaven, and a cloud received him out of their sight. None could have personated the Crucified with the hope of deceiving his very disciples. His disciples could have been mistaken in their belief of having seen him after his resurrection, no more than they could have been mistaken in their belief of having seen him before. They were not predisposed to credulity. Didymus was not the only doubter ; Jesus himself reproved their general unbelief. The accuracy of the senses of the eleven was tested by the senses of others ; the risen Saviour appeared to more than five hundred at one time. The heathen, Tacitus, unwittingly bore testimony to the truth of the resurrection. For what else could have caused the faith of the cross, seemingly interred forever in the tomb of Joseph, suddenly to "burst forth," and overspread Judea ? The wonderful resuscitation of the new religion demonstrates the resuscitation of its Founder. Had the apostolic report been false, the overwhelming union of Jewish and

Roman power would have smothered it on the spot.

The descent of the third person of the Trinity ranks in wonder with the incarnation and resurrection of the second. Without the coming of the Comforter, the Gospel would have been but a lifeless letter. His advent and gracious presence are rapturously attested by the sacred writers. The particular manner of his visible descent, is related by Luke in the Acts of the Apostles. Argument is not required to show that there could have been no mistake in the reality of the astounding demonstrations at pentecost.

Paul, though converted after the resurrection, and doubtless the youngest of the apostles, was nevertheless a cotemporary of Jesus Christ. When Stephen was stoned, a few months after the ascension, the clothes of the martyr were laid down "at a young man's feet, whose name was Saul;" and who even then had attained sufficient maturity of age to be intrusted with official authority. Bent on exterminating the new and hated sect, the self-possessed pharisee, on his way to Damascus, armed with letters from the high priest, was suddenly smitten to the ground at mid-day, by a light above the brightness of the sun. The light was accom-

panied by a Voice appealing to him by name. The awful Voice he twice addressed; twice the Voice replied; the last time at considerable length. If Paul was deceived, the deception could only have been caused by mental aberration. But aberration of the intellect would not have produced physical blindness; and he of Tarsus was three days without sight. If the whole was but the complicated development of a strange insanity, the malady must have been contagious; for his companions saw the light and fell to the earth, and heard the Voice, though they understood not the words.

Further corroboration of the reality of the wonderful phenomena, is found in the independent revelation to Ananias. The saint of Damascus affirmed, that the Lord had appeared to him in a vision, informing him of the mid-day prodigies, and sending him to the relief of the sightless penitent. Entering the house where Paul was lodged, he laid his hands upon the blind man, "And immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales; and he received sight forthwith, and arose and was baptized." The falling scales and the instantaneous restoration of the visual organs to health, upon the touch of the holy man, were palpable and tangible wonders, which no trick of fancy or men-

tal illusion could have produced. Paul was not deceived. Either the miracles were real, or else the pupil of Gamaliel, and his companions on the way, and the pious Ananias, were all banded together in a foul conspiracy.

Paul claimed that he himself was endowed with the gift of miracles and of tongues. Did the power to work signs and wonders exist in his "mind's eye" alone? Was he deceived when he thought that, by a look, he had smitten the sorcerer with blindness? Was his belief that by a word he had cured the man lame from his mother's womb, so that he leaped and walked, mere self-deception? Did he but imagine that he had cast out the evil spirit which tormented the possessed damsel? Did he but dream that he had raised to life the young man fallen down from the third story and taken up dead? Was it fancy that pictured the poisonous viper fastened on his hand and shaken off without harm? And his gift of tongues—was that too the mere creation of a disordered mind? Was it in thought alone that he traversed the ancient world, preaching to each nation and tribe, in its own strange dialect, the "good tidings of great joy."

The apostle to the gentiles was not a person to be habitually deceived. Though ardent, he was col-

lected; to a glowing heart he united a clear head. Brilliant as was his imagination, it served as a willing handmaid to his intellect. Profound as was his learning, it was controlled by a dominant infusion of plain and practical good sense. In him were harmoniously united the man of the world and the man of God. Antiquity produced no one less likely to become the dupe of deception than the tent-maker of Corinth.

The apostolic claim to the possession and exercise of miraculous powers and to the gift of tongues, was not confined to Paul. In speaking without exception of the early missionaries of salvation, he himself says, "God also bearing them witness both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles and gifts of the Holy Ghost." This claim to preternatural endowments, unless true; must have been intentionally fraudulent; it could not have been the effect of innocent delusion. There can be no pretence that the whole apostolic band were madmen; their writings bear record demonstration of their general sanity.

There is, indeed, a limited yet insidious disease of the intellect, termed monomania, which consists in partial derangement of some one faculty, or in mental aberration upon some one subject. A mo-

nomaniac might possibly have imagined for a time that he was the worker of miracles. But such an hallucination could never have become an epidemic, pervading an entire class, affecting each individual with the same identical symptoms, and continuing for a succession of years. The gift of tongues would have been an endowment peculiarly difficult to be lastingly imagined. A few experiments and failures would have been sure to dissolve the illusion.

The christian record bears no mark of apostolic hallucination. Its writers, and the faithful of whom they wrote, were strangers to the influences of wild enthusiasm ; they betrayed no indications of an overheated imagination ; they maintained a healthful tranquillity even where excitement might have been expected. Primitive Christianity was not more distinguished for its zeal than for its equanimity. Not a fanatic appeared in its pious groups. The ebullitions of extravagant rhapsody find no countenance in the example of the meek, the serene, the unimpassioned Jesus. Not akin to religious frenzy was the defection of Peter, or the skepticism of Thomas. Not symptomatic of a diseased intellect was the cool, the collected, the sublime heroism of Stephen.

Thirdly.—In estimating the chances of misconception by witnesses, the triers in a court of judicature always regard their number. This is a rule of evidence not only sanctioned by the wisdom of ages, but also founded in the common principles of our nature. Several witnesses are incomparably less liable than one to an error of the senses. The difference depends not so much on the power of numbers as on a sort of moral arithmetic. The senses of one man may sometimes beguile him; but the concurrence of many in affirming the same fact of which they have been eye or ear witnesses, almost precludes the practicability of mistake.

These considerations must not be undervalued by the investigator of the christian evidences. There are eight writers of the Gospel; Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Paul, James, Peter, and Jude. Some of these writers enter less than others into the detail of the scriptural signs and wonders; but even James, Peter, and Jude virtually affirm the incarnation, death, and resurrection of the Son of God; and these three events constitute the triple foundation of our faith. To the christian miracles in some stages of their development, each of the evangelical writers was a personal witness; and

his means of learning the facts were ample and infallible. Mistake was impossible.

The testimonials of the sacred writers have all the attributes of depositions, and may well receive that imposing name. They were at least equivalent in sanction to oaths in a court of justice. That which gives its binding force to judicial depositions is the appeal of the deponents to the Searcher of hearts. The evangelical deponents also appealed to the Searcher of hearts; and their appeal was made under every circumstance of solemnity that could bind the consciences of responsible beings. They virtually invoked upon themselves the blessing or the curse of God, as their asseverations were true or false. If the scriptural depositions are false, the writers were guilty of moral perjury, unequalled in turpitude by any legal perjury ever perpetrated on earth. They deliberately insulted the Majesty of heaven; and have deceived, not an individual only, but a world!

Under the juridical systems founded on the common law, one witness is generally sufficient to sustain an affirmative. Fortunes are daily lost and gained, and lives forfeited or saved, upon the strength of a single oath. The Jewish code required two affirmants; but two affirmants fully

satisfied even the rigor of the Mosaic institution. The Gospel has benignly afforded to the feeble faith of mortals the benefit of eight original and concurring witnesses. This feature in its authentication should be profoundly estimated by the honest student of the christian proofs. Who, sitting in the seat of a juryman, would gratuitously take upon himself the responsibility of discrediting eight concurring and uncontradicted witnesses, swearing positively to things which their own eyes had seen or their own ears heard ?

Man would be an isolated and miserable being if he could repose no confidence in testimony, judicial and extrajudicial. Faith in human testimony is the solace of life, the cement of commerce, the gravitating principle which binds together the moral elements of the world. Burst it asunder and substitute in its stead the distrust of each in the asseverations of all, and our race must relapse into the original chaos from whence it was redeemed by the consolidations of society. The light of day might as well be extinguished as faith in human testimony. Universal darkness would not be more appalling than the universal domination of heartless, cheerless skepticism.

CHAPTER X.

THE SAME SUBJECT CONTINUED.

Writers of Gospel not deceivers—Truth has a manner of its own—Directness, simplicity, and ingenuousness of evangelical witnesses—Examples of their candor—Purity of their moral character—Proved by their writings—By history—By the confessions of infidels—Had not primitive christians been of pure character, new faith would not have outlived its Founder—Writers of Gospel consistent in narratives, doctrines, and precepts, without studied uniformity.

HAVING shown in the last chapter, that the writers of the Gospel could not have been innocently deceived in the christian miracles, we now proceed to show that they were not wilful deceivers. For this object we shall, as in the last chapter, resort to those juridical balances, whose accuracy in weighing testimony has been tested by the experience of ages. If it be true that sometimes “the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light,”* and if it be also true that the judicial generations have from the beginning lived and moved, and had their being in cultivating and

* Luke xvi. 8.

perfecting the science of evidence, let "the children of light" deign to receive, in this particular department, some practical lessons from "the children of this world."

First.—When witnesses, in a secular court, testify to improbable events, the triers steadfastly mark their manner as a criterion of their honesty. Truth has a manner of its own, not easy to be described, but instinctively felt. Successfully to counterfeit the truthful manner, is scarcely within the compass of human art. It is, indeed, declared that sometimes "Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light." But the transformation requires all the adroitness of the arch-fiend. A work of fiction, though drawn by the ablest of pens, may be distinguished by the critical and experienced from a narrative of facts. Paintings, however perfect, are not nature. The Grecian pencil beguiled birds; it aspired not to beguile sagacious men.

Let the student of the christian evidences scrutinize profoundly the manner of the sacred depositions. Among the prominent badges of the truthful manner, are directness, simplicity, and ingenuousness. These badges are engraved on every page of the Gospel testimonials. Take, for in-

stance, the four histories of our Lord. The tale of the lisping child, to whom deceit is a stranger even in name, is not more direct, simple, and ingenuous, than the narratives of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. They bear intrinsic marks of being the impersonation of verity ;—not its semblance chiselled out by the artist, but its original, breathing, speaking reality. If they are fabulous, the unlettered Galileans possessed a power of counterfeiting truth unequalled in the annals of the human mind.

Take, as another example, the defences of Paul before the Roman governors. What was it which made Felix tremble in the presence of his helpless prisoner? What was it that drew forth the exclamation from Festus, “Paul, thou art beside thyself; much learning doth make thee mad?” What was it that almost persuaded Agrippa to be a christian? Fiction never developed such scenes; none such are portrayed in the pages of poetic lore. Paul was a friendless stranger; humble, penniless, despised, chained. Yet truth had nerved his heart with her potency; clothed him in her simple, majestic robes; imparted to him her own peculiar, ineffable, overpowering, godlike manner. No wonder that the licentious Felix trembled; that the haughty

king was shaken; that the infidel Festus thought the speaker mad. The best antidote against unbelief is the study of the evangelical depositions. Had Rousseau read them with candor and humility, he might have been healed of his morbid skepticism. "Search the Scriptures," is the counsel of him who spoke as never man spoke. It was the prescription for the heart by the great Physician who made it, and knew all its maladies and their cures.

Artlessness is the garb of truth. Fiction, if it would pass for verity, must counterfeit that garb. Nor could the disguise be long concealed. Between the simulated and the natural, the discerning eye will soon discover the distinction. Nothing can surpass in genuine artlessness the evangelical writers. They employed no stratagem to gain credence. The thought of being disbelieved seems not to have entered their simple imaginations. Overwhelmed themselves by the absorbing truth of their story, they dreamed not that its fidelity would be questioned. They rehearsed astounding miracles without any expression of astonishment or effort to excite astonishment in others. They recounted the signs and wonders as the known and acknowledged prodigies of the new religion, with-

out thinking any more of using artifice in the narration, than the American geographer would think of using artifice in describing the stupendous falls of Niagara. They proclaimed the descent and incarnation of the Son of God; and deemed his mighty works but the appropriate accompaniments of his advent. Sincerity is stamped on every page of the Gospel. Its naturalness is no more simulated than the blue of the skies.

Secondly.—Juridical triers look for candor in the witnesses as a test of their honesty. But they sometimes look in vain. Deponents who would recoil from perjury, often fail in impartiality; unwilling to utter a direct falsehood, they nevertheless disguise the truth by deceptive coloring; seduced by their partialities and prejudices, they degenerate into partisans; their memories become flexible and accommodating, retentive of facts that strengthen the cause espoused by them, and oblivious of circumstances that would weaken it. Man is by nature a one-sided being. Partial to his friends and unjust to his foes, he is, without the influence of grace, a stranger to pure ingenuousness. Even classic history rises not above the bias of nationality. Where is the secular annalist to be found,

who has done the same ample justice to hostile countries as to his own native land? Viewed at one time in the mirror of French, and at another in the mirror of English history, how different do the events of modern times appear!

Lack of candor always impairs, and often destroys the testimony of an affirmant in a court of justice. But if, irrespective of the contending parties, and unsparing even of his own errors and faults, the witness testifies with unsullied and magnanimous impartiality, the jury, though they may deem him mistaken, never believe him a wilful perverter of the truth. They may distrust his accuracy, but they welcome him to their hearts as an honest man.

Conscious of the deep-rooted biases of our common nature, and of the manner in which they are regarded by juridical triers, let the explorer of the christian evidences contemplate and admire the matchless candor that distinguishes the pages of the Gospel. Uninspired biographers, if partial to the personage they portray, always incline to exaggerate, or at least to embellish his virtues. Upon their adored Master, who had redeemed them with his own blood, the evangelical biographers bestowed not a sentence of elaborated eulogy. With the

most unaspiring simplicity they reported his sayings, doings, sufferings, and death, and left the unvarnished narrative to speak for itself. Toward his persecutors and murderers, they displayed no vindictive hostility. Fruitful as was the theme for incensed vituperation, the disciples of the meek and merciful Jesus forbore. They remembered that their dying Lord had said, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." They stated with calm serenity his arrest, trial, and crucifixion, with the mockings, and scourgings, and spittings, but without any intermixture of those indignant epithets from which unsanctified humanity could not have refrained.

The writers of the Gospel were themselves apostles, and thus interested in the exaltation of the apostolic character. Yet they cast no veil over the delinquencies of the primitive disciples. The high-reaching ambition of the sons of Zebedee ; the unfaithfulness of the self-confident Peter ; the desertion of the whole apostolic band when their aid and sympathies seemed most needful ; the pertinacious skepticism of Thomas, are all detailed without hesitancy or extenuation. Such details were prompted by the same ingenuous candor that recorded the aberrations and crimes of the Old Testa-

ment saints. Had the evangelical narratives been creations of fancy, Judas might not have figured as a chief actor in the fabulous drama. That the omniscient should have fostered a traitor in his bosom, has ever been a mote in the diseased eye of infidel casuistry.

In the immediate biography of Jesus Christ, passages are to be found, which artful impostors might have chosen to avoid in a work of fiction, arrogating for itself the character of truth. His intense agony in the garden, sweating "as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground;" his fervent, thrice-repeated supplication, "O my Father, if it be possible let this cup pass from me;" and the descent of the strengthening envoy from the court of heaven, might, to the cavilling mind, seem, perhaps, to betoken a faltering of purpose in the incarnate Deity, which an author of romance would not willingly impute to its hero. Skilful fabulists mar not their works with unexplained mysteries. In delineations of the imagination, mysteries indeed often appear; but they come like meteors to thrill and dazzle for awhile, and then are made to pass away under the plastic touch of ingenious solution. Adroit authors of fiction are not wont to leave behind them unsolved mysteries to prey upon the

unsatisfied imagination. It was not the fabulous pen, but the Spirit of Truth, that has in his inscrutable wisdom engraved on the everlasting record of the Gospel the unfathomed and unfathomable wonders of Gethsemane. The candor of the evangelical witnesses is infallible proof of their honesty.

Thirdly.—When the improbability of testimony justly exposes it to peculiarly rigid criticism, the juridical triers, still loath to cast upon a fellow-creature the imputation of corrupt false swearing, turn for relief to the moral character of the witness. Truthful is the apothegm of the wisest of men, “A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches.” It is a peerless gem in prosperity, and in adversity it is “a friend that sticketh closer than a brother.” That a liar is scarcely to be believed though he speaks the truth; and that a witness of unsullied character is not presumed to be perjured though he testifies to facts in themselves improbable, are suggestions of common sense sanctioned by municipal law. A good name derives its tutelar charm from its being the outward demonstration of indwelling virtue. Virtue is the substance of which a good name is the faithful shadow. If by the strangeness of his evidence, or the cogency of op-

posing proofs, doubt is for the moment cast upon the integrity of an honest witness, he may triumphantly dispel that doubt by invoking plenary testimonials to his unspotted reputation. From the demonstration of his pure fame the jury justly infer the rectitude of his moral principles ; and they well conclude that virtue, though she may have often mistaken the facts to which she deposed, never wittingly committed the crime of wilful and deliberate perjury.

The depositions of the evangelical witnesses were, as we have seen, equivalent in their sanction to oaths in a court of justice. In judging whether, in their wonderful narratives, the deponents were wilful deceivers, the student of the christian evidences may derive unspeakable assistance from a close view of their moral character. Their virtues are seen in their works as in a glass. Their writings are the faithful mirror of their minds. The Gospel could not have been composed by bad men, any more than the turbid and poisonous fountain can send forth clear and wholesome streams. The impious or the vicious could have been its authors no more than the African can change his indestructible hue. Its theism and its ethics, so meek, so holy, so sublime, so godlike, stand far as the

over-arching heavens above the teachings of combined profligates. They could have infused into the Gospel its moral and spiritual colorings, so pure, so uplifting, so various, so harmonious, so distinct, and yet so commingled with each other, no more than they could have spoken into existence the tints of the rainbow.

But the moral character of the evangelical witnesses has other demonstrations beside their writings. The unanimous voice of christian antiquity, from its primitive epoch, proclaimed their matchless virtues. General report is the method of establishing character immemorially practised in courts of judicature. The reputation of persons living in early times, is proved by ancient writings. How else could we have learned the virtues of Socrates, or the infamy of Nero? The contemporaries of the apostles would not have combined to clothe them in a reputation not deserved; and had such a combination existed, it must have been detected and exposed by generations immediately succeeding.

The Jews stood sentinels over the christian church. Had there been a stain on the character of the primitive disciples, Jewish malignity would have proclaimed it to the four winds of heaven.

If the thirty pieces of silver had wrung from Iscariot any revelation impugning the integrity of his Master, or of his brethren, the high priests and scribes and pharisees would have given it a circulation and perpetuity wide and lasting as the Hebrew race. Josephus wrote about sixty years after the ascension. The christian Scriptures had been recently published, and constituted the wonder of the world. Had blemishes been discovered in the apostolic character, they must have affected the credibility of the new religion ; and the vigilant Hebrew historian would have grasped and spread them with exulting avidity. About the year one hundred and eighty, the rabbi Judah, as we have seen, compiled and published the Mishna, consisting of the Hebrew traditions. Had he been able to find in the repositories of Jewish calumny, a single report tainting the purity of the apostolic name, the learned and rancorous Israelite would not have been speechless upon the exciting and absorbing theme of the religion of Jesus Christ.

The Roman Pliny, in his official letter to his imperial master, written at the beginning of the second century, was obliged to admit the morality of the primitive believers, and that the torture had drawn nothing from them except the assurance

that, far from being engaged in any unlawful conspiracy, they were bound by a solemn oath to abstain from the commission of those crimes which disturb the private or public peace of society; from theft, robbery, adultery, perjury, and fraud. And even the infidel historian of the "Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire," has in modern times assigned the virtues of the first christians as one of the five causes of the wonderful diffusion of the Gospel.

Had the original christian witnesses been of suspicious reputation, the new faith would not have been likely to outlive its Founder. It was needful that its transcendent excellence should be bodied forth in action as well as in writing. Its miracles were not more conducive to its dissemination than the immaculate character of its primitive professors. The holy lives and the exulting deaths of the early believers, were appeals to the infidel world, perhaps more affecting and resistless than the curing of the sick by a touch, or the raising of the dead by a word. The electric spread of the Gospel is a monument to the virtues of its primeval witnesses, palpable and lasting as the perpetual hills.

Fourthly.—Where a plurality of witnesses are

invoked to sustain the same facts, the triers in a court of justice studiously examine whether they agree with themselves and with each other. Falseity in a protracted narrative, is generally inconsistent with itself; and, if several witnesses combine in a scheme of deception, they seldom fail of coming into collision with themselves or their associates. Consistency is a characteristic of truth difficult for falsehood to imitate; especially where the imitation is to be effected by more than one. Not even the gold of the Jewish council could make the false witnesses against Jesus Christ agree together.*

But want of harmony in witnesses called to support the same side, is not more fatal to their credibility than too close a resemblance. A stereotyped accordance between several narrators argues conspiracy and drilling. Men differ in their perceptions, in their memories, in their mode of presenting truths, as much as in their outward forms. In outward form there may not be two of exact similitude in the grand and final assemblage of human kind. And why should mental sameness be expected any more than corporeal? Truth never came from different lips in a long and unconcerted narrative,

* Mark xiv. 56.

without some slight variation in its shades. Identity would imply that it had been "learned and conned by rote."

The investigator of the christian evidences will find in the Gospel depositions no studied uniformity, and no discrepancy incompatible with their common verity. The eight witnesses to the New Testament manifestly wrote without concert; they have no artificial sameness of style, narrative, or doctrine. Their ostensible disagreements are often startling to the superficial observer, and have furnished some of the most formidable weapons ever wielded by infidelity against the faith of the cross. Such impediments to prompt belief would not have been infused into their writings by an adroit band of fraudulent conspirators. But the occasional semblance of inconsistency in the sacred witnesses has been explained by the labors of pious criticism; and the harmony of the Gospel is now as clearly demonstrated as the harmony of the spheres.

CHAPTER XI.

THE SAME SUBJECT CONTINUED.

Writers of Gospel had no motive to deceive—Not moved by revenge—Or prejudice—Or hope of temporal emolument—Or desire to gain fame by tales of wonder—Incurred by their testimony certain obloquy, privations and sufferings, and probable torture and martyrdom—Conditions of discipleship foretold from beginning—Martyrdom, though not always proving orthodoxy, proves sincerity of victims.

It is in the detection of motive that the science of juridical evidence displays its utmost prowess. When in a court of justice, testimony is loaded with intrinsic improbability, and when the facts utterly exclude the supposition of unintentional mistake or mental hallucination, so that the triers have no alternative but to believe the witness true, or else to believe him perjured ; then it is that the juridical science of evidence comes to their aid and enables them to solve the problem of innocence or guilt with almost infallible certainty by probing “the thoughts and intents of the heart.” Has any sinister motive led the witness astray ? Was he stimulated by revenge or prejudice ? Was he beguiled by the

hope of gain, direct or consequential? Was he urged onward by ambitious promptings? Was his astonishing testimony induced by the thirst of distinction?

These are inquiries to which the minds of the startled triers will anxiously address themselves. And if the circumstances of the case, evolved, perhaps, by the pressing machinery of questioning and cross-questioning, return to each of these inquiries a negative response, full and clear as the solar rays; and if furthermore it should appear beyond peradventure that the witness by testifying incurred inevitable obloquy, privations and suffering, and imminent jeopardy of imprisonment, torture and martyrdom, the triers could not, because he testified to facts new and strange to their limited experience, pronounce him guilty of perjury, without violating their own official oaths which bind them to decide according to the evidence. The difficulty of disbelieving the testimony would be immeasurably enhanced if it should be confirmed by seven other independent witnesses testifying, like the first, without liability to impeachment of motive, and like him, incurring by the very act of their asseveration sure obloquy, privations, and suffering, and probable imprisonment, torture, and martyrdom.

Let the tests of motive, so efficient in the juridical science of evidence, be invoked into the christian service, and applied in all their power to the eight evangelical witnesses.

First.—The writers of the Gospel were not instigated by revenge or prejudice; nor were they moved by the hope of temporal gain. At the time of their conversion, the peasants of Judea were strangers to the heathen world. Neither against polytheism, nor the faith of their mother-land, had they any vengeance to wreak. To the Mosaic institutions and the traditions of the elders, they were attached by the ardent prepossessions of childhood. Paul was “a pharisee, the son of a pharisee,” brought up at the feet of Gamaliel.

Nor were the evangelical witnesses beguiled by the expectation of temporal emolument. They had plighted their allegiance to a King whose natal palace was a stable, whose throne was a cross, whose crown was of thorns, who declared of himself “My kingdom is not of this world,” and whose only resting-place on earth was a stranger’s grave. What temporal gain could they expect from following an indigent Preacher of righteousness, who, in this vast globe, had not “where to lay his head?”

The apostles themselves lived and died in abject poverty, meekly and contentedly working with their own hands.

Secondly.—The writers of the Gospel were not stimulated by a thirst of worldly renown. It is true that the love of fame is an active passion of the human soul. For the love of fame the poet has sung, the philosopher toiled, the warrior dared the utmost perils of “the imminent deadly breach.” But the evangelical witnesses knew from the beginning that their earthly portion would be obloquy, enduring as life. How could the disciples hope to escape those poisoned calumnies which had encompassed their Lord from the waves of Jordan to the tomb of Joseph?

The apostles have, indeed, succeeded to an inheritance of posthumous renown immeasurably surpassing that of any martial conqueror. But conscious impostors could not have anticipated such a consummation. The disciples had beheld their Master betrayed and arrested; they had deserted him and fled; hovering round the summit of Calvary they had seen him crucified between two thieves. Nothing but his resurrection could have resuscitated the hopes of his discomfited followers.

Had not Jesus Christ risen from the dead, the christian system must have been buried forever in the sepulchre of the Arithmathean. His rising on the third day was the seal of heaven to the truth of his religion. Uplifted by the certainty of their Lord's resurrection, the sure precursor of their own, the apostolic witnesses surveyed the vista of time through the telescope of faith. They beheld the spread of the everlasting Gospel, and, perhaps, caught glimpses of their own terrestrial celebrity ages after their decease. By the same telescope of faith they gazed upward through the opening heavens, and saw their names "written in the Lamb's book of life." And with such seraphic visions before them, how insignificant must have seemed the proudest entries on the scroll of mortal fame! It was not for the bubble of posthumous applause, but for the unfading joys prepared for them at God's right hand, that, like their Master, the apostles "endured the cross, despising the shame."*

Thirdly.—The writers of the Gospel were not prompted to their perilous enterprise by a morbid

* Hebrews xii. 2.

passion to astonish the world with tales of wonder. The marvels of redeeming love surpass the darings of the boldest romance. Fiction would not have attempted to body forth the incarnation of the Creator of the universe ; his birth in a manger ; his sojourn on earth for more than the third of what we term a century ; his abject penury ; his sweat of labor in the workshop of the carpenter ; his sweat of blood in the garden of Gethsemane ; his washing of the feet of his betraying and deserting disciples ; the scoffings, scourgings, and spittings that he so meekly endured ; his crucifixion between malefactors ; his prayer for his murderers. We admit that the passion of recounting and listening to marvellous relations, is a deep-seated principle of our common nature. It is developed even in the nurseries of childhood. But no writer of romance, however strong may be its intrinsic fascinations, would willingly pursue his vocation, under the certainty that it must subject him to privation, want, and infamy, from which he could hope for no respite, save in the sanctuary of the grave.

Fourthly.—The contumely, persecutions, and sufferings which the Gospel entailed on its early promulgators, are unexampled in the annals of human

woe. Tacitus, as we have seen, declared of the primitive christians, that they were "branded with deserved infamy," "for their hatred of human kind." Paul affirmed of himself and his apostolic brethren, "We are made as the filth of the earth, and are the offscouring of all things unto this day."* The persecutions and sufferings of the christians of the first three centuries, are written on the pages of ecclesiastical and secular history, in characters of blood. Their persecutions and sufferings were predicted by the Gospel itself. Its Founder decoyed none into his service by flattering assurances never to be realized; to his followers he explicitly foretold the terms of apostleship. "But beware of men: for they will deliver you up to councils; and they will scourge you in their synagogues; and ye shall be brought before governors and kings for my sake, for a testimony against them and the gentiles." "And ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake." "It is enough for the disciple that he be as his master, and the servant as his lord; if they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more shall they call them of his household?" And even in his last most pathetic

* 1 Corinth. iv. 13.

interview with his chosen disciples, he tells them, broken-hearted as they were, "If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love his own; but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you. Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord; if they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you." "They shall put you out of the synagogues, yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service."

Such were the avowed conditions of discipleship in the school of Jesus. Had the primitive believers recoiled from suffering when called on to suffer, they would have belied their faith. Had they not been called on to suffer, their faith would have belied itself. The prediction of their sufferings formed a vital constituent of the Gospel; the failure of the prediction would have shown the Gospel to be a fiction. Prophecies unfulfilled prove the prophet an impostor. Had early Christianity passed scathless through several successive generations, its continued tranquillity would have demonstrated it to be "of the earth, earthly." Its enemies would have pointed contemptuously at its unaccomplished

predictions; and the “slow unmoving finger” of scorn would have been of more exterminating power than the stake, the cross, or the lions.

Time speedily evinced the truth of the evangelical denunciations; it brought down upon the early faithful the full weight of the foretold sufferings. There was no failure in the prophecies of the Gospel. Among the christian sufferers the sacred writers held precedence. In their own persons they helped to fulfil the predictions which their own hands had recorded. Their agency in the promulgation of the Gospel marked them as prominent objects of the world’s vengeance. This they must have expected from the beginning. And is it indeed to be believed; that the evangelical witnesses, without motive of revenge, or gain, or ambition, headed an impious conspiracy for the pre-meditated and sole purpose of earning for themselves obloquy, persecutions, and sufferings lasting as life and more bitter than death? Yet such is the faith that infidelity would inculcate as a substitute for the faith of the Gospel!

There was an element in the sufferings of the primitive faithful, not perhaps so palpable to the eye of history, as their imprisonments and physical tortures, and yet no less “piercing, even to the di-

viding asunder of soul and spirit." Christianity reared a wall of partition between them and those unbelieving companions to whom their hearts had most fondly cleaved. This rupture of social ligaments was predicted by the Founder of the Gospel : " Suppose ye that I am come to give peace on the earth ? I tell you nay, but rather division." " The father shall be divided against the son, and the son against the father ; the mother against the daughter, and the daughter against the mother."*

To the primitive christians it was no slight bereavement to have thus severed the warm ties which had bound them to the dear friends of their youth, the beloved associates of all their toils, their pleasures and their griefs : to behold familiar faces, heretofore lighted up with smiles, now covered with the wintry frown ; to see hands once extended for the friendly grasp, now indignantly repulsive to their kindest advances. Paul doubtless felt the alienation of the companions of his early studies, and the estrangement of the venerable Gamaliel, more keenly than he did the revilings and lashes of stranger foes. And the iron grasp of early infidelity rent asunder even the strong chords of na-

* Luke xii. 51, 53.

ture. The unbelieving parent anathematized the believing child ; the unbelieving child poured contempt on the believing parent.

Voluntary expatriation for conscience' sake is, perhaps, the most arduous achievement to which humanity ever attained. The Lacedæmonian legislator who bound his countrymen by oath to maintain his laws inviolate until he should himself return, and then went into perpetual exile to pine away and die in a foreign clime, thus giving permanence to his laws by his own self-banishment, was doubtless a more suffering patriot than the Spartan hero who at Thermopylæ sought and obtained an immortality of fame. Self-banishment may be effected without change of domicil. It is less its hills and its vales, than its social charms that bind us to our native land. Severed from these ties of affection we become exiles, though we may remain at home. The most terrible isolation is that which is encompassed by alienated friends. To this exile of the heart the primitive disciples became the victims. They gave up for Christ the loved companions of their childhood, their brethren and sisters, and fathers and mothers ; "they forsook all and followed him." And if they were conscious hypocrites, the faith they professed afforded

them no substitute for the sacrifices they had made. They became aliens to God as well as to their friends, and kindred, and country.

Fifthly.—Further proof that the evangelical witnesses were sincere and honest in delivering their testimony is derived from the additional fact that it exposed them, not only to contumely, persecutions, and sufferings, but to imminent jeopardy of martyrdom. This impending jeopardy they understood from the first; for it was recorded in their own writings. Multitudes of the apostles drank of the cup of which their Master had drank, and were baptized of the baptism of which he had been baptized. To the honors of martyrdom, two at least of the evangelical writers attained; and their deaths of torture are supposed to have occurred in the memorable gardens of Nero. The imperial Julian sneeringly points to the sepulchres of Peter and of Paul in his own capital.

Martyrdom, though it does not always prove the orthodoxy of the martyr, is full demonstration of his honesty. It is to be borne in mind that paganism ever stood ready to relent, if the doomed victim would but sacrifice to her gods; a single act of oblation would always have rescued him, even at the

last extremity. Polytheism welcomed back christian recreants, as her own prodigal sons returned to the maternal bosom. She received them not only with affection, but with favor. No man ever died to vindicate a known lie, when he might have saved his life, and his honor too in the estimation of the world, by simple recantation. Voluntary martyrdoms have sometimes been incurred in the cause of error; never in the cause of hypocrisy. The Gospel writers, then, were not hypocrites; the dungeon, the stake, and the cross attest their sincerity.

It is true that the martyrs of the primitive church professed to be sustained in the midst of their agonies by ecstatic communion with their risen Saviour, and transporting views of the joys which awaited them in the paradise so near at hand. But this profession was sheer hypocrisy, if they believed that the Gospel was only a delusion. An imposture, known and felt to be such, has no charms to soothe and ravish the departing spirit. Had the tortured and condemned promulgators of the persecuted faith been professors in name only, and unbelievers in heart, they would not, even in imagination, have been sustained and gladdened at the dying hour by those glories of the opening heavens which transported the stoned Stephen. Nor could they, if

conscious hypocrites, have hoped to enjoy even the fabled elysium of polytheism. For they had irreverently affronted all the false deities of Olympus, as well as that sublime and unapproachable Essence whom the heathen sometimes termed the Soul of the universe, and ignorantly worshipped as "The unknown God;" they had forged his awful name to a record of falsehoods; they had set the world on fire, and impiously pretended that the flame came down from heaven. Thenceforth "a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation" must have preyed on the souls of the blaspheming reprobates, and darkened even their dungeon's gloom.*

* Hebrews x. 27.

CHAPTER XII.

THE SAME SUBJECT CONTINUED.

Auxiliary and supplemental witnesses to christian miracles—Gospel made miracles test of its divinity—Age of miracles continued near seventy years—During miraculous age all christians had sure means of ascertaining genuineness of miracles—Bore testimony to their genuineness by perilous adhesion to persecuted faith—Miracles the evidences of title to the promised inheritance above—Seekers after truth of Gospel would scrutinize closely these evidences before giving up all to purchase inheritance—Witnesses to miracles thus multiplied to many thousands—Each witness testified by his act as strongly as he could by his pen or oath—Argument of Leslie drawn from institutions of Baptism, Lord's Supper and christian Sabbath—New Testament and old parts of same system—if Gospel forged so were Jewish Scriptures.

WE have hitherto limited our remarks upon the proofs of the christian miracles to the depositions of the eight writers of the Gospel. But it must never be forgotten, that the truth of those depositions is confirmed by a mighty host of collateral and supplemental witnesses.

Jesus Christ declared, “For the works which the Father hath given me to finish, the same works that I do bear witness of me that the Father hath

sent me."* "If I do not the works of my Father, believe me not. But if I do, though ye believe not me, believe the works."† He appealed to his works as proofs that he was the Son of God. He exacted belief or sanctioned unbelief, as his works were or were not miraculous. The Redeemer dealt with those he came to redeem as with rational beings ; he required not blind reliance on the truth even of his own benign declarations ; he rested the authentication of his messiahship on his signs and wonders. And the Gospel announced that to his apostles he bequeathed miraculous powers as the palpable seals of their heavenly mission. Paul affirmed, in his second epistle to the church planted by him at Corinth, "Truly the signs of an apostle were wrought among you in all patience, in signs and wonders and mighty deeds."‡ And in his epistle to the Hebrews, when speaking of the apostolic missionaries to the dispersed nations, he declared, "God also bearing them witness both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost."§ Thus the Gospel made the genuineness of its mighty works the test

* John v. 36.

† John x. 37, 38.

‡ 2 Corinthians xii. 12.

§ Hebrews ii. 4.

of its credibility. Among those works it classed the supernatural gift of tongues claimed to be exercised by its primitive preachers.

In the age of Jesus of Nazareth, and in the apostolic era succeeding his decease, the profession of his religion was attended with tremendous sacrifices. All sublunary hopes were to be abandoned for the hope of an unseen inheritance beyond the grave. The palpable proofs of the reality of that inheritance were the signs and wonders claimed to be wrought by the Founder of Christianity and his apostles. Those signs and wonders were the official credentials of the Gospel. On those credentials would be riveted the inquisition of the world. More especially intense must have been the scrutiny of those who were about to exchange the religion of their ancestors for the new faith which promised nothing below the skies save obloquy, privation, and suffering.

Even an earthly estate, though comparatively of ephemeral worth, is not purchased without a previous and thorough examination of the evidences of its title. No purchaser would rely on the mere representations of an unknown vendor. The heavenly estate proffered by the Gospel, as far surpassed in value any terrestrial acquisition as the

duration of eternity surpasses the duration of time. But the terms on which the celestial inheritance was offered to the primitive inquirer, were strict, uncompromising, and startling. He must forsake the world, and take up his cross daily, and follow the crucified Redeemer. Costly and perilous was the proposed investment; on the evidences of its reality, it is most unlikely that the searcher after truth would permit himself to be deceived. The heavenly inheritance was presented to him as the "one pearl of great price;" but before he "went and sold all that he had and bought it,"* the common principles of human nature assure us that he would have sought, as for his life, to learn whether the seemingly precious jewel might not be a counterfeit. The christian signs and wonders were the sure touchstone for trying it. If they were found to be illusory, the inference would be inevitable that what purported to be "the pearl of great price," was but a bauble of earthly mould; if the miracles were ascertained to be real, they demonstrated it to be genuine and enduring as the eternal throne.

The personal followers of our Lord were eye and ear witnesses of his miracles. Their united senses

* Matthew xiii. 46.

could not have deceived them. By the very act of adherence to the new faith, they testified to their cotemporaries and to posterity, that his signs and wonders were supernatural. They became fellow-witnesses with the eight writers of the Gospel. The thousands of dwellers at Jerusalem who were made converts to Christianity within a few days after its Founder had been crucified as a malefactor, must have known of their own knowledge, whether his crucifixion was attended with the quaking of the earth, the rending of the rocks, and the darkening of the sun ; and by plighting their allegiance to the persecuted religion, they bore unequivocal testimony to the fact of those stupendous prodigies. Living upon the spot cotemporaneously with his alleged resurrection, they were surrounded with demonstrations of the truthful or fabulous character of that event so vital to the christian faith. That they cast in their lot with the people of God, is irrefragable evidence that they knew the resurrection to be a glorious reality.

To the stern test of miracles, the Gospel submitted itself for almost seventy years after the death of its Author. The apostolic era, commencing at the time of the ascension, terminated not until the decease of the last of the chosen twelve ; and Saint

John survived until nearly the end of the first century. That whole era claimed to be a continuation of the age of miracles. It was not the original miracles performed in Judea during the lifetime of the Saviour, to which alone the Gospel referred when stating that signs and wonders were its authenticating credentials. The gift of tongues was not imparted until the day of pentecost. Miracles were the avowed credentials of Christianity in all its pristine progress. The nations were authorized by the Gospel itself to require the display of those credentials as a preliminary to their belief. They were not bound to heed the heralds of the cross, unless they exhibited "THE SIGNS OF AN APOSTLE." A total dearth of miracles during the era claimed as miraculous, would have been fatal to the cause of Christianity. It would have betrayed a discrepancy between what it had professed and what it had performed. In its falsified pretensions, unbelief would have found a triumphant apology. Had the world, by the most profound and searching scrutiny, been able to detect any imposture or failure in the christian signs and wonders, the Gospel, making its miracles the test of its truth, would have perished by its own suicidal hands. The astounding progress of Christianity during the first century,

is, therefore, conclusive demonstration that it faithfully performed what it had professed ; and that its victories were achieved “with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost,” not simulated but genuine.

There was no possibility of mistake in the reality of the christian prodigies. The age termed miraculous, including the time of the public ministrations of our Lord, continued about threescore years and ten ; it embraced two entire generations of the human family. During this long period the proselytes of the new religion gathered in the vast continents of Asia, Europe, and Africa, were spectators and auditors of its signs and wonders. Whether the sick were cured, the dead raised, the elements controlled by a word ; and whether the various nations and tribes were addressed in their own multifarious and strange languages, by Jewish fishermen, publicans, and tentmakers, scarcely understanding the rudiments of their mother tongue, were simple points which the senses of all observers could ascertain with unerring precision. They had not to explore distant countries ; the wonderful demonstrations were brought home to their own doors. Without the fullest confidence in the reality of the celestial inheritance promised to the faithful, and

attested by the signs and wonders of the Gospel, the spiritual children of the age held miraculous, so vast in their numbers, so diverse in their nativities, their speech, their intellectual and social conditions, would not voluntarily have exchanged the fascinations of this alluring world for the lives of privation and suffering, and the deaths of torture exacted by the faith of the carpenter's Son. Individuals may be deluded for a time by fictitious miracles; but where the professed miracles are open, public, and diffused, such delusion could not overspread continents and reign for generations, especially at a period distinguished for mental culture.

The evangelical deponents who composed the Gospel were but eight in number. But they were reinforced by an auxiliary army of collateral and supplemental witnesses, extending from the conversion of water into wine, by Jesus Christ, at Cana of Galilee, to the close of the apostolic era, and amounting to hundreds of thousands. Every year of the memorable epoch swelled the mighty array. Before its close Christianity had spread itself into almost every country of the then known world. Each step of its triumphant march had multiplied the proofs of its heavenly origin by multiplying the witnesses to the genuineness of its

authenticating prodigies. Few written testimonials from these collateral and supplemental witnesses have reached the present day. But stronger than writings, in convincing power, were their perilous professions of the persecuted faith. They testified by their acts more irresistibly than they could have testified by their oaths. Actions speak louder than mere words flowing either from the tongue or from the pen.

It cannot be imagined that for the greater part of a century, and in almost every country of the known world, the converts to the Gospel were deceived by simulated miracles. The nature of the miracles, and their wide diffusion and long-continued duration, precluded the possibility of deception. Nor can it be imagined even by the infidel, that the mass of primitive believers, whose unwritten and unassuming testimonials to the genuineness of the christian signs and wonders have descended along the track of time like a deep, silent, overpowering stream, were all combined in a fraudulent conspiracy to deceive their fellow-beings. What could they have gained by becoming parties to such a conspiracy? Infidelity has urged that the writers of the Gospel were pressed onward by the thirst of distinction. If this charge was truth-

ful instead of being, as it is, grossly libellous, how could it apply to the common mass of the early converts? There is a distinction between the teachers of a theory and the taught. Should the authors of an imposture be impelled by the expectation of acquiring for themselves a false renown, from its ingenuity, novelty, and success, how could the deluded dupes of the imposture aspire to share in the triumph? It was not, then, the desire of fame, but the almighty truth, which induced the unambitious multitudes of early proselytes to abandon the religion of their fathers, for the detested and despised faith of the cross.

Beside the eight writers of the Gospel, and the numerous converts to Christianity in the first century, there was yet another class of witnesses to its signs and wonders, not to be passed over in silence. To the fact of those signs and wonders, the unbelieving Jews and gentiles of the age termed miraculous bore reluctant but resistless testimony.

The primitive unbelievers well knew, that from the beginning, the Gospel had announced its miracles as its official credentials; that it made them the test of its truth; that in its march from country to country it had everywhere displayed them in the face of its enemies, whose most rigid scrutiny it had

openly challenged. That challenge its enemies could not elude. They gazed on the prodigies, and wondered, and trembled, and blasphemed. They well knew that if they could pierce Christianity in the vital constituent of its miracles, the wound, however slight, must be necessarily fatal. Yet with the most ample means of examination, they detected no deception in the christian wonders. That their closest research, animated by untiring zeal, could detect no imposture, was conclusive evidence to all posterity that no imposture existed. The Jews ascribed the stupendous works to the agency of Beelzebub; the gentiles to magic learned in Egypt. By thus attributing them to demoniac or magical influences, both Jews and gentiles admitted their existence and supernatural character. The total denial that prodigies were wrought by Jesus Christ and by his apostles, is an achievement of modern infidelity. Both Celsus and Julian, as we have seen in a former chapter, virtually admitted the reality of the christian signs and wonders.

Baptism, the Lord's Supper, and the Christian Sabbath are public monuments authenticating the miracles of the Gospel.

These memorials of dying love could not have been the inventions of an age posterior to that as-

signed for their origin. The Gospel affirms that they were coeval with the death of its Founder; and that the whole christian church had from the beginning recognized them as divine institutions. Had they been first introduced in a subsequent century, their assumption of an anterior date would have been an imposture palpable to universal perception. None could have been ignorant that they had never been heard of before; and their fraudulent claim to antiquity would have concentrated upon the christian name the just indignation of an outraged world, and blighted all hopes of enlarging here below the empire of the Prince of peace.

Nor could Baptism, the Lord's Supper, and the Christian Sabbath have been originally established in the age to which the Gospel ascribes them, unless they had for their broad and deep foundation the verity of the facts of which they preserve the remembrance. They commemorate not the death of Jesus Christ alone, but also all the miracles by which he authenticated his messiahship, whether performed by himself or by his apostles. They commemorate the whole stupendous panorama of salvation. Those monumental institutions would not have been reared and perpetuated by the unan-

imous concurrence of the early church, had a shadow of suspicion rested upon the miraculous demonstrations of the Gospel's truth.

The observance of the institutions was attended with the most imminent perils to the primitive professors. The heathen Pliny admits in his letter to his imperial sovereign, herein before set forth, that when the early believers met "on a stated day," "to repeat among themselves a hymn to Christ as to a God," they were obliged "to meet before daylight." It was only under the shade of night that they could venture to chaunt the praises of their Redeemer. According to the same authority, their sacramental feasts exposed the communicants to the most pressing danger of torture and death. Even the pious deaconesses, referred to by Pliny, were not protected by their sex or age from the common and appalling jeopardy. The christian ordinances could not have survived for a single year the wrath of persecution, unless the divinity of the Gospel had been confirmed "with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles and gifts of the Holy Ghost." Nothing but the outstretched arm of God saved them from the fury of man.

The argument for the truth of Christianity, drawn from its commemorative institutions, seems to have

been first presented by Leslie; and his "Short and Easy Method with the Deists," has long been justly celebrated for its brevity, acuteness, and force.

If the Gospel is a fabrication, it is impossible that the Jewish Scriptures should have been written by the finger of God. The two codes are linked together by indissoluble ties. The Old Testament is replete with prophetic delineations of the Messiah of the New; the New Testament abounds in approving references to the Old. If the eight writers of the Gospel joined together in an unholy league, the grand scriptural conspiracy for the deception of the world, must have been as ancient as the pentateuch. Between the date of the books of Moses and the close of the apostolic era, sixteen hundred years elapsed. A fraudulent conspiracy, without prospect of wealth or fame, could not have found aliment to live on for so many centuries. The secret of the imposture must have been confided to all the principal confederates. That fatal secret could not have escaped detection by domestic treason or foreign scrutiny during such a succession of ages. If not otherwise brought to light, the confessions of the death-bed would at some time have betrayed it. These thoughts are strongly and beautifully expressed by Dryden in the follow-

ing lines, blending with the force of truth the charms of poetry :—

“Whence, but from heaven, could men unskilled in arts,
In different ages born, in different parts,
Weave such agreeing truths? Or how, or why
Should all conspire to cheat us with a lie?
Unasked their pains, ungrateful their advice,
Starving their gains, and martyrdom their price.”



CHAPTER XIII.

HUME'S OBJECTION TO MIRACLES.

Miniatue of Hume's theory—Vagueness in his use of term experience—General uniformity of nature's laws proved by human testimony—So may any exceptions to that uniformity—On Hume's theory miracles not to be believed on evidence of our own senses—Evidence of senses not more infallible than well sustained testimony of our fellow-men—Man lives in world of miracles and is himself a miracle—No objection to miracles that they are designed to authenticate a system of religion—Such miracles imbued with intrinsic probability—No impostor ever founded new system of faith on miracles.

HUME may, perhaps, be deemed the prince of infidels. His deadly aim at the heart of our holy religion, caused at first some alarm in the christian world. But the bolt has fallen powerless to the earth. By a sort of second sight the Scotch philosopher indulged the assurance that his celebrated essay on miracles would live and reign until the end of time. He says; "I flatter myself that I have discovered an argument which, if just, will with the wise and learned, be an everlasting check to all kinds of superstitious delusion; and consequently will be useful as long as the world endures. For so long, I presume, will accounts of miracles

and prodigies be found in all history, sacred and profane." The following is a miniature of the theory on which he so boldly raised his hopes of immortality. He contends that our belief of facts is founded on experience alone; that experience teaches that nature's laws are inflexibly uniform, and that human testimony is lamentably deceptive; that a miracle would be a violation of those fixed laws; that when a miraculous event is affirmed on the credit of human testimony, the affirmation is opposed by our sure experience of the established course of nature; and that in such contest, the evidence against the alleged miracle, arising from the established course of nature controls and overrules the human testimony in its favor, as in a conflict between the fallible and the infallible, the latter must always predominate. From these premises is drawn his confident conclusion, that no accumulation of human testimony whatsoever can establish a miracle, upon which any system of religious faith is sought to be reared.

The skeptical philosopher uses the term experience in a sense not always free from equivocation. He seems to imply by the term, sometimes our own individual experience, and sometimes the experience of mankind in general.

If we are to believe only what we have learned from our own experience, our faith in facts would be confined to limits exceedingly diminutive. Comparatively few know from personal observation, that, on some shores, the tide rises to the height of sixty or seventy feet; or that the wind, so famed for its variableness, blows in certain latitudes from a single point throughout the year; or that meteoric stones of ponderous weight have often fallen from the skies. Yet all justly believe in the existence of these phenomena on the credit of universal report. If personal experience is the only true basis of belief in facts, the Saracen monarch was right in rejecting as fabulous the tale of the northern crusaders, that in their climate, rivers and lakes were sometimes congealed by frost so as to bear the weight of marching armies; and he was wrong in afterwards yielding credence to the seeming prodigy on the faith of human testimony.

Nor are miracles to be discredited because they have not been familiar to the experience of mankind in general. The definition of a miracle implies a departure from laws ordinarily uniform. The arrest of the sun on Gibeon would not have been a preternatural wonder had the luminary of day been accustomed to pause in its career. Mir-

acles are exceptions to the general order of the physical universe ; and it is to be expected that the witnesses to the exceptions should be the few and not the many. It is a vital element in the infidel theory, that miracles are opposed not only to the general, but also to the universal experience of the human race. A single acknowledged deviation from the laws of nature, in any country or age, would be fatal to the theory. "There must, therefore," says Hume, "be a uniform experience against every miraculous event; otherwise the event would not merit that appellation."

In assuming it as a truism, that miracles are opposed to the immemorial and universal experience of human kind, the philosopher takes for granted the very point in issue between him and christians. We utterly deny the truth of the position, so confidently assumed. The philosopher's palpable offence against the first principles of sound logic is styled in Latin *petitio principii*, and, in plain English, begging the question. The burden of proving that the laws of nature have been inviolable from the beginning, devolved upon him. He attempts summarily to dispose of this *onus probandi* by the bare and bold assertion, that their inviolability has been established by "a firm and unalter-

able experience." No other proof does he deign to suggest. But how did he ascertain this experience? He could not have acquired it by intuition, or by his own personal observation. He possessed not the attribute of ubiquity; nor did his memory reach back to the birth of time. He must have gathered the materials of his knowledge from history and general report. It was human testimony that gave aliment to what he presumes to call "a firm and unalterable experience." Excepting the diminutive speck of his personal observation, he had no source save human testimony, from whence he could derive information respecting the experience of the human race.

Human testimony is, then, the basis of the reckless proposition, that miracles are opposed to im-memorial and universal experience. Thus human testimony is made, chameleon-like, to change its complexion, according to the point it is called on to support. When sustaining his theory of the immutability of nature's laws, the insidious skeptic affects to regard it as of incontrovertible authority. But he vituperates it as utterly unworthy of credit, when invoked to demonstrate that God, for gracious purposes, has sometimes suspended or varied the physical laws of his empire. Hume expressly

declares, "And therefore we may establish it as a maxim, that no human testimony can have such force as to prove a miracle, and make it a just foundation for any system of religion."

Such are the inconsistencies of infidelity! It was never before intimated that evidence held sufficient to prove a general rule, should not be deemed equally sufficient to prove any exceptions to that rule. If history and general report are competent to establish the uniformity of the laws of nature, why should they lack competency to establish miraculous suspensions of that uniformity? Yet the candor of infidelity would array human testimony in the habiliments of an angel of light when testifying in the cause of unbelief, and brand her as a deceiving spirit when testifying in the cause of salvation!

Miracles may be proved like other facts. All the events on earth may be proved by the denizens of earth. Miracles are, indeed, encumbered with intrinsic improbabilities, and require an extraordinary amount of evidence to confirm them. But that their intrinsic improbabilities are incapable of being overcome by any conceivable accumulation of human testimony, is a proposition opposed alike to the principles of jurisprudence, philosophy, and

common sense. The proposition is neutralized even by Hume himself in another part of his self-conflicting essay. He admits that any miracle may be proved by testimony, if "the testimony be of such a kind that its falsehood would be more miraculous than the fact it endeavors to establish." In the four preceding chapters, we have sought to show, and we trust not without success, that the falsehood of the collective proofs of the christian miracles, would be a greater prodigy than the miracles themselves. If we have been successful, the signs and wonders of the Gospel might find an impregnable asylum even in the theory of their arch foe, as expounded by himself.

The hypothesis that a miracle cannot be proved by human testimony, because, while such testimony is ever deceptive, the laws of nature are forever immutable, draws after it, if true, the consequent truth that a miracle cannot be proved by the united evidence of our own senses. For even our own senses are often faithless; the eye, the ear, and the touch frequently beguile. We may imagine that we see and hear, and handle the miraculous demonstration. But, if graduates in the school of infidelity, we must, to be consistent, hold that our visual, auricular, and sensitive organs have combined

to betray us. For it is the master dogma of cheerless unbelief, that the physical laws of the universe have been fixed and changeless from the beginning; and to believe on the evidence of our misleading senses, that the awful uniformity of nature has been recklessly violated, would be yielding to the fallible predominance over the infallible.

Supposing the miracle of the five thousand fed with the five loaves and two small fishes to have been a solemn reality, still the beholders, if chilled with the creed of infidelity, could not have yielded it the tribute of grateful credence. True, they had heard the gracious benediction prefacing the wonderful repast ; they had seen the scanty elements multiplied by the creative touch ; they had handled them with their own hands ; they had felt within themselves the satisfying and invigorating influences of the ample feast. Yet conscious of the fallibility of the senses, and imagining that they read the dogma of nature's changeless laws, written, as it were, on the arch of the overhanging heavens, they must have been forced to the melancholy inference that the whole beneficent panorama was but a delusion of the imagination.

The evidence of our senses is not more demonstrative of facts than is often the well-sustained

testimony of our fellow-men. Each organ of vision, of hearing and of touch, has but a single voice; the testimony of our fellow-men frequently overpowers us with its thousand tongues. What American, though he may not have crossed the Atlantic, can doubt the existence of the European continent? Would the evidence of his own senses make his "assurance doubly sure?" What skeptic of this western hemisphere can distrust the reality of that revolutionary struggle, which purchased our independence? Scarcely would his conviction be strengthened by his youthful reminiscence, that he had himself heard the groans of the patriot warriors and seen their "garments rolled in blood."

It little becomes the pigmy lord of earth to repudiate all miracles, because to his microscopic vision they seem to disturb the harmony of the creation. He stands between "two infinitudes," lost in amazement as he gazes on the mysteries of the by-gone and coming eternities; the wheeling orb on which he dwells was miraculously brought into being; he himself is "fearfully and wonderfully made." That a breathing, moving, thinking, speaking miracle—in the midst of a universe of miracles—should discard the demonstrations authenticating sacred truth, because they are miraculous, is a superadded prod-

igy, scarcely less strange than those from which he turns so irreverently away.

The prince of doubters feared to risk his anticipated immortality of fame upon the naked proposition, that human testimony is incompetent to establish a miracle. In the latter part of his essay, so involved throughout in civil war with itself, we find superadded to the declaration, that "a miracle can never be proved so as to be the foundation of a system of religion," the following controlling qualification; "For I own that otherwise there may possibly be miracles, or violations of the usual course of nature, of such a kind as to admit of proof from human testimony." It cannot but be perceived, that this qualification, by the philosopher himself, is a death-blow to his paramount dogma, that the immutability of nature's laws is established by "a firm and unalterable experience."

The chieftain of disbelief admits, that any miracle may exist and be proved, except a religious miracle. He withdraws the ban of infidelity from the probation of supernatural signs and wonders, unless the signs and wonders have for their object a theological system. Such a distinction is sustained or countenanced by no precedent or principle in the whole science of evidence. The capacity of a fact

to be proved, depends not upon the uses to which it may be afterwards applied. A fact, when proved, becomes a fixed and dominant truth, operating within its sphere, without limitation or stint. A miracle is emphatically the truth of God; for his own right hand has wrought it. And who can rightfully interpose hindrances of human invention to the probation of God's own truth? Why should a miracle be denuded of its susceptibility of verification, common to miracles in general, because its Author graciously displayed it to authenticate to his creatures a revelation from himself? The design or purpose of a supernatural phenomenon cannot affect its capability of being proved by human testimony. All miracles are equally suspensions or variations of the physical laws of the universe; all are accomplished alike by the special intervention of almighty power; and all are for objects requiring, in the estimate of infinite wisdom, that the course of nature should be interrupted.

Suspensions or variations of the laws of nature are not intended for concealment; they are not enacted in "a corner," or to be hidden "under a bushel;" they are public acts, designed by their divine Author for promulgation among the dwellers upon the earth, and their distant posterity. This

peculiarly applies to cases where the miracles have for their end the authentication of a system of faith. How could the purposes of enduring publicity be accomplished without the intervention of human testimony? Must the wonderful displays be continued from generation to generation? During the whole march of time must the laws of nature stand still? Truthful narratives of miraculous events are to be transmitted from age to age, for the edification of mankind; and human testimony is the only appropriate channel of transmission. But if the signs and wonders are of a religious bearing, the infidel theory would hermetically seal up this needful channel; and consign to "dumb forgetfulness" all by-gone miracles, having for their object the salvation of man.

Nor are the deponents to the christian prodigies affected with any personal taint, impeaching their credibility. It was never intimated, save in the wintry code of skepticism, that moral pureness and exalted piety are impediments to the competency of witnesses, either in judicial tribunals or before the grander inquest composed of the countless millions of christendom.

Religious miracles are invested with an intrinsic probability, which would not apply to miracles of a

secular character. The supposititious report sneeringly imagined by Hume, that after her public death and interment, and the coronation of her successor, queen Elizabeth had risen from the dead and resumed the English throne, would have represented an idle and wanton violation of the laws of nature, for no other purpose than to raise the wonder of the world. But the christian miracles were suspensions or variations of nature's laws, for an object worthy of nature's God. Miracles are the appropriate, the probable, and, as it were, the natural accompaniments of a revelation from above. If the message of Jesus Christ was of celestial origin, the presumption of reason is, that it would have been authenticated "with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles and gifts of the Holy Ghost." At the ushering in of a divine revelation, the absence of attesting miracles would have been an event stranger than their occurrence. It was confidently to be expected that "as the thunderbolt pursues the flash," a spiritual illumination bursting forth from heaven, would be attended with supernatural demonstrations, palpable to the senses and affecting to the hearts of human kind.

Hume's philosophy was little better than his theism, when he urged the intrinsic likelihood that im-

postors, fabricating a novel system of faith, would risk their superstructure upon the unstable foundation of fictitious miracles. Claims to false prodigies have been, indeed, often engrafted on superstitions previously existing, and lending to the deceptions their friendly countenance and active support. But no author of an original and isolated imposture, hostile to all prevalent systems of belief, ever ventured, under the supervision of vigilant and implacable enemies, to subject his pretensions to the trying ordeal of works claimed to be miraculous. Suppose that in our own age and country, a theological adventurer, denouncing all the existing religions of earth, should proclaim himself to be a prophet sent from heaven to found a new and exclusive creed, and, in authentication of his pretended embassy, should profess to heal the sick, raise the dead, and control the elements, by the word of his power; that his boastful demonstrations should be open, public, and diffusive as the light, and that, instead of avoiding, he should challenge, from town to town, from village to village, and from city to city, the presence and scrutiny of his ever wakeful and multitudinous foes.—How sure, how swift, how overwhelming would be his discomfiture!

Should any infidel reasoner object to our supposition as referring to an age and country distinguished for intelligence and learning, and for consequent capacity to detect imposture, we would point him to Arabia, the land of fiction, credulity, and delusion. No theological adventurer was ever more enterprising or sagacious than the false prophet of Mecca. But Mohammed dared not submit to the test of miracles, his supernatural claims. He professed to be greater than Moses or Jesus Christ; yet the Koran is crowded with apologies for his acknowledged want of miraculous gifts. In the precarious infancy of his fortunes, his friends besought him, and his foes tauntingly challenged him, to authenticate his pretensions to inspiration by signs and wonders. But from this desperate attempt, so sure of speedy and ignominious detection, the wily Arab pertinaciously recoiled. He knew, he felt the hopelessness of any effort to sustain, even among an ignorant and imaginative people, a new, exclusive, and uncompromising faith, by counterfeited miracles, watched by the never-sleeping jealousy of scrutinizing enemies.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE MIRACLE OF THE NEW BIRTH.

Regeneration wrought by special power of Holy Ghost against laws of our fallen nature—It is a miracle endorsing and authenticating Gospel—Each true believer “hath the witness in himself” that he has been born again, and that Gospel is true—Miracle of new birth evidence to all the world of Gospel’s truth—Each participant of eucharist makes solemn affirmation by the act of participation that, according to his best belief, he has been born again—Such affirmation equivalent to deposition in court—These depositions amount to many hundreds of millions—Deponents all deceivers, or deceived; or else new birth a reality, and Gospel from God—New birth standing miracle.

To the Jewish dignitary Jesus Christ declared, “Verily, verily, I say unto thee, except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.” Though this declaration seemed strange to the master in Israel, yet even reason must perceive and feel its truth, if, with the Gospel in her hand, she will contemplate the subject with the same candor and diligence which she is wont to bestow upon matters of secular science.

That man is by nature fearfully depraved is demonstrated, not only by Scripture, but also by the profane history of every age and country. The

world's annals are written in blood, and stained with crime. Nor are the codes of earthly jurisprudence less conclusive of the fall. Courts of law, civil and criminal, venerated as they justly are, would have been but useless incumbrances, with all their compulsive machinery, their remedies for violated pacts, their pains, penalties, and punishments, had man remained pure. Each jail, each penitentiary, each state prison, each gallows, bears melancholy testimony to the depravity of our apostate race. To restrain man from plundering and murdering his fellow-man, legislation has been obliged, at all times and places, to invoke all the resources of its wisdom and skill. Nor has human wickedness confined itself to the breach of the social duties. Had its might been equal to its will, it would have scaled the heavens and dethroned the Sovereign of the universe. Fallen man is at enmity not only with his fellow-creatures, but also with his God. If any one is inclined to deem this picture exaggerated, let him cast his vision inward, and learn its truth by profound and candid communion with his own heart.

Without a radical change of moral nature it is impossible that man should be happy here or hereafter. Sin and bliss dwell not together; happiness

and holiness are twin sisters, whose elements are so compounded that they cannot live apart. Crime blotted out earth's Eden; and "except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God." Should he with his natural heart be admitted into the upper sanctuary, it would be no paradise to him. How could he join, with lips uncleansed, in the pure psalmody of the skies? And there sits the ever-living Jehovah, clothed in the robes of holiness, whose eyes are "as a flame of fire." From that dread presence the unregenerate sinner would seek refuge even in the vaults of despair. Reason herself must perceive that renovation of heart is an indispensable preparation to admission into the kingdom of heaven.

The regeneration of the soul is not within the compass of human effort. Though skilled in theological learning, Nicodemus could have devised no way in which a fallen creature can be born again. Man has accomplished much; he has moved onward with gigantic steps in the exploration of the universe; he has tamed into his service the potency of steam, and the mightier power of electricity. But his own little heart man has never changed. Unless touched by grace, it is the same now as it was in the days of Cain. The leprosy of moral

evil is cureless by sublunary skill. Human science has elevated the intellect; but it wields no lever of sufficient compass to lift the carnal soul from the depths of spiritual degradation. Heathen Athens and Rome were, in all their pride and glory, but moral Sodoms.

Regeneration is a miracle wrought by the Holy Ghost. Any suspension or variation of the physical laws of the universe is a miracle. The moral laws of human nature are just as inflexible as the laws of the physical world. The unregenerate man is "dead in trespasses and sins." His resurrection to spiritual vitality is directly opposed to the established laws of his fallen nature. Unaided humanity can no more regain its pristine holiness than the cataract can re-ascend the mountain height. Regeneration is, then, a miracle. And it is a miracle in its character more astounding than was the resurrection from physical death at the grave of Lazarus. Of the prodigies which rendered memorable the journey of the persecuting Saul, from Jerusalem to Damascus, the greatest of all was the removal of his "stony heart," and the substitution of "an heart of flesh." The light and the voice from heaven, and the blindness, and its unearthly cure, surpassed not, perhaps, in miraculous grandeur

the arrest of the sun in its course. But the conversion of the heart was a miracle that required the sufferings and death of the incarnate Deity. The salvation of the soul could be purchased only by the blood of God.

It has been said that the age of miracles is past. The saying is not true. The ordinary miracles of the Gospel ceased, indeed, about the end of the first century of the christian era. But the extraordinary miracle of the new birth has pursued its noiseless, majestic, onward course, scattering its demonstrations throughout the world. All other miracles have been superseded and absorbed in this the mightiest of them all, as "the stars hide their diminished heads" in the presence of the king of day. This wonder of wonders, coeval at least with the days of Abel, will maintain its triumphal march until the angel, standing with his right foot upon the sea and his left foot upon the earth, shall lift his hand to heaven and swear by Him that liveth forever and ever that time shall be no more.

The miracle of the new birth incontestably establishes the inspiration of the Sacred Oracles. They are replete with predictions of the triumphs of the Gospel by regenerating grace. Every new birth is a fulfilment of scriptural predictions. Prophecy

fulfilled, shows the inspiration of the prophet. Uninspired mortality could not penetrate the veil of the future. The conversion of the nations by the potency of the new birth, shows that the seers who in Holy Writ foretold it centuries before, were taught of God. The new birth is an epitome of the practical truths of Revelation, stamped by the Holy Ghost on the human soul. When the believer meditates on his own renovated aspirations, and compares them with the aspirations of the pious David, or of the consecrated Paul, he has internal evidence of their exact identity. "As in water face answereth to face,"* so does the image reflected from himself answer to the spiritual original. The accordance between the miniature volume of the regenerated heart, and the Volume of Inspiration, demonstrates that both are of the same divine origin.

The Gospel is the instrument by which the Holy Ghost is wont to effect the miracle of the new birth. He would not recognize this instrument as his own, if it was the fabrication of impostors. The Spirit of Truth, in his miracles of grace, would never sanction an impious falsehood. Every time he ap-

* Proverbs xxvii. 19.

plies the Gospel to the regeneration of souls, he authenticates its inspiration anew. He most emphatically proclaims its divine origin, when he sends it abroad among the nations as the efficient organ of universal evangelization. Infidelity will scarcely venture to deny that the new birth, if a reality, proves the genuineness of the Gospel.

Regeneration is the seal of heaven stamped upon the believing heart. The believer, while in the exercise of gracious affections, is intuitively conscious of the divine impress. He who has been born again, learns from the whispers of his own heart, that he is the child of God. He feels that his Saviour has given him to "eat of the hidden manna," and presented to him "a white stone," and in the stone "a new name written."* "The hidden manna" is the banquet of redeeming love. The "white stone" is the gem from heaven, whereon is inscribed his own name; imperceptible, indeed, to physical sight or touch, but palpable to the rapt vision of faith.

We do not mean to intimate, that the christian convert is always in the exercise of gracious affections. In his passage through the wilderness of

* Revelation ii. 17.

life, he is sanctified only in part. As sin forfeited the primeval paradise, so it may dim and chill the renovated paradise of the believer's soul; it may obscure and almost obliterate the celestial image which regeneration had implanted there; it may for months, perhaps for years, hide from his bewildered vision, the impress of heaven's signet ring, made on his heart at the day of his espousals.

But when the believer lives as he ought to live, he "hath the witness in himself,"* not only of his own regeneration, but also that the Gospel is the Word of God. He is conscious that he has "passed from death unto life," by the resuscitating influences of the Holy Ghost, and the new birth felt in his own heart, endorses and authenticates the new birth delineated in the Sacred Volume. His natural enmity to his Creator is changed into love. He loves the divine law, which once frowned upon him with the terrors of Sinai. Holiness is unveiled to him in its native beauty. He loves the Lord Jesus Christ. He regards as "the chiefest among ten thousand," Him in whom he once saw "no form nor comeliness." He feels that he has been called "out of darkness into his marvellous light." With the

* 1 John v. 10.

convert in the Gospel, blind from his birth, he exultingly exclaims, "One thing I know, that whereas I was blind, now I see." There are bright moments when, with Job, he can say, "I know that my Redeemer liveth;" and, with Paul, "I know whom I have believed." In those moments his faith in the Gospel depends not upon the preponderance of nicely balanced probabilities; it is passed into knowledge; he "hath the witness in himself."

The true believer is "the temple of the Holy Ghost." The Spirit of Truth is his Schoolmaster. The indwelling God teaches the verity and power of his own Sacred Word to his humblest children, not by the ordinary process of ratiocination, but by an influence which, like the lightning of heaven, "is felt though it cannot be followed." The devout peasant who drove his "team a-field" in the age and country of Hume, would have risked nothing by hostile encounter with the Goliah of skepticism. The infidel, indeed, wielded in his left hand the vaunted fallibility of human testimony, and grasped in his right the alleged inflexibility of nature's laws. To this imposing array, the pious ploughman could interpose neither the blandishments of rhetorical diction, the subtileness of logic,

nor the treasures of historical learning. Yet with a sincerity attested by moistened eyes, he could meekly lay on his breast his labor-hardened hand, and unfalteringly avouch his intuitive consciousness—a consciousness imparting courage to brave the torturing wheel or the cross of martyrdom—that he was himself the recipient of an abiding miracle, sure as the noonday sun, and more stupendous than any which had ever given sight to physical blindness or vitality to natural death.

The evidence of the Gospel's divinity, derived from the miracle of the new birth, is not confined to the regenerate. It appeals to every human heart, regenerate or in a state of nature, and its appeal must force admittance, unless the entrance is closed and barred by incorrigible prejudice.

Since the original institution of the eucharist, hundreds of millions have partaken of that holy ordinance. The opinion has obtained currency in the ranks of Protestantism, that the Roman Catholic creed does not require that conversion should precede communion. But the error of this opinion clearly appears from the highest authorities of that ancient church. The following are extracts from the catechism of the council of Trent, published by the command of Pope Pius V.

"We now come to point out the manner in which the faithful should be previously prepared for sacramental communion. To demonstrate the necessity of this previous preparation, the example of the Saviour is to be proposed to the faithful. Before he gave to his apostles the sacrament of his body and blood, although they were already clean, he washed their feet to declare that we must use extreme diligence to bring with us to its participation the greatest integrity and innocence of soul. In the next place, the faithful are to understand that, as he who approaches thus prepared and disposed, is adorned with the most ample gifts of heavenly grace: so on the contrary, he who approaches without this preparation, and without these dispositions, not only derives from it no advantage, but plunges his own soul into the most unutterable misery."

"But when it is said that this sacrament imparts grace, it is not intended to mean that to receive this sacrament with advantage, it is unnecessary to be previously in a state of grace. Natural food can be of no use to a person who is already dead: and in like manner the sacred mysteries can avail him nothing who lives not in spirit. Hence this sacrament has been instituted under the forms of bread and wine, to signify that the object of its institution is, not to recall to life a dead soul, but to preserve life to a living one."

"We should also reflect in the silence of our own hearts how unworthy we are that God should bestow on us this divine gift; and with the centurion, of whom our Lord declared, that he found not so great faith in Israel, we should exclaim, 'Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldst enter

under my roof.' We should also put the question to ourselves, whether we can truly say with Peter, 'Lord, thou knowest that I love thee;' and should recollect, that he who sat down at the marriage feast without a nuptial garment, was cast into exterior darkness, and condemned to eternal torments."*

It has, then, been from the beginning, the established doctrine of christendom, that participation in the Lord's Supper is a public profession of having "passed from death unto life." By the act of communion, each communicant, for himself, has made his solemn declaration in the presence of men, angels, and God, that, according to his best knowledge and belief, founded on his own christian experience, he had become the favored recipient of the great renovating miracle. This declaration was, at least, equal in solemnity to an oath in a court of justice. What is it which gives its sanction to a judicial oath? It is not the mere touching of the book by the hand or the lips; it is not the sign, but the thing signified; it is the tremendous appeal to the Searcher of hearts, that imparts to it its sacred character. And is not the sacramental declaration

* Catechism of Council of Trent, Sacrament of the Eucharist. Donovan's Translation, pages 165, 167, 169.

an appeal to the Searcher of hearts, made under circumstances at least as awful as those which attend the judicial attestation? Is the altar of our religion a less holy place than the bar of our courts? Is the tasting of the flesh and blood of the Son of God, even symbolically, less heart-thrilling and soul-binding than the touch of the cover of his book? True, the sacramental deposition is not, like the juridical, written with pen and ink on parchment or paper; but it is registered by the recording angel on the everlasting records of heaven.

These christian depositions are the sacred relics of more than eighteen centuries; they come up to us from every clime and every tongue. They are the testimonials of the devout living, and of the pious dead; they are wafted from each christian temple; they ascend from each christian cemetery and church-yard; they are echoed by the ancient ruins of Asiatic cities, and reverberated by the valleys of the young West; Ethiopia lifts her confirmatory voice, and it is answered from the islands of the remotest Pacific. If to these Gospel depositions we superadd the long train of saints who preceded the birth of Christ, we shall find the witnesses to the reality of the new birth swollen to a host that baffles the computation of arithmetic.

And how is the unregenerate inquirer, professing candor, yet hovering between the twilight of doubt and the daylight of truth, to meet and overcome these mountains of depositions? If he is not ready to admit, that they prove beyond peradventure the miracle of the new birth, and consequently the inspiration of the Gospel, he must maintain, either that these hundreds of millions of deposing witnesses have been wilful deceivers, or else that they were themselves all miserably self-deceived. It is not enough for him to show that *many* hypocritical or beguiled professors have mingled in "the sacramental host of God's elect;" he must, to palliate his indecision, taint with hypocrisy or self-delusion, each and every individual in the whole mighty mass of the Old and New Testament saints. Infidelity must bend or break, if, along the track of time, a single unimpeached and unimpeachable witness is found to confirm the prodigy of regeneration, and the consequent divinity of the sacred oracles.

None, it may be presumed, will deliberately contend that the almost countless millions of deponents to the miracle of the new birth, have unanimously banded together in a base conspiracy to deceive human kind. Extravagant would be the supposition that a confederacy of such extent, compounded

of hostility to earth and impiety to heaven, had pursued, without detection, its triumphant march of conscious guilt for near six thousand years, "with an eye that never winks and a wing that never tires;" traversing with more than quixotic zeal all lands and seas in quest, not of gain or aggrandizement, but of persecution, torture, and martyrdom; proffering nothing to its depraved adherents but a life of hypocrisy here, and, unless the grave is the place of eternal sleep, sure and interminable perdition hereafter.

Can infidelity successfully resort to the other branch of the alternative, and maintain that the almost innumerable millions of deponents to the miracle of the new birth, have been themselves the miserable victims of self-delusion, without one solitary exception in any age, language, or country? We have seen that each christian professor, when first admitted to the banquet of redeeming grace, deposed for himself individually, that according to his best knowledge and belief, he had been made the subject of the great renovating marvel. His attestation was not prompted by momentary impulse, or by the ebullition of sudden feeling. Weeks, perhaps months, of rigid and honest self-examination, doubtless preceded this the most mo-

mentous act of his life. He paused; he deliberated; he deposed. The subject attested required no compass of historical erudition, or profound scientific research. He had but to compare with diligence and candor the little volume of his own heart with the Volume of Revelation. For this examination the peasant was as competent as the philosopher.

At every succeeding return of the feast of love, the christian professor confirmed the sacramental deposition made by him at his first espousal. Months may have intervened between the successive ordinances; but months of renewed and profound deliberation severed him not from his firm-seated hopes. Sometimes, indeed, he was ready to succumb under the burden of indwelling sin. In his christian warfare, he was conscious of viewless foes walking in darkness; he was conscious, too, of a viewless Preserver. When rescued amidst the billows of life's tempestuous ocean, he knew, like Peter, that it was the hand of his Master which saved him. Each advance in experimental religion, strengthened his evidence of the regenerating miracle. Death came at last to translate him to the skies.¹¹¹ His dying deposition was made. It may have been sealed in blood drawn from him by the nails of the cross, or by the devouring teeth of

savage beasts ; it may have been perfected at the martyr's fire, lighted up as his chariot to heaven ; it may have been consummated in the meditative and peaceful chamber of protracted illness. Wher-ever made, the final deposition of the expiring saint breathed forth no longer mere belief. His confi-dent hope was transformed to certain knowledge. His faith was swallowed up in vision, even before he bade the world farewell.

The evidence to the miracle of the new birth, derived from the experience of the New Testament church, had been anticipated by the experience of the earlier believers. They had prospectively eaten of the same bread, and drank of the same wine, which were afterwards distributed by Jesus Christ to his disciples in the upper chamber at Jerusalem. Enoch and Abraham, and the whole brotherhood of the Old Testament saints, were washed in the blood of propitiation, long before it began to flow in the veins of the infant Emmanuel. They beheld afar off the day of the Son of man ; and in anticipation of his advent, "confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth." They solemnly professed to have been "born again," and to have "passed from death unto life." How touching, how demonstrative, how overpowering

are the depositions of Job, of David, and of Isaiah to the reality of the great renovating prodigy! The phenomenon of the new birth was known to Abel when he "offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain."* It has since been manifested to the faithful of every age, in every country. Hundreds of millions of regenerated souls could no more have been unanimously mistaken in the existence of the phenomenon, than they could have been mistaken in the existence of the sun in the firmament.

The honest inquirer after truth will be confirmed in the sure conclusion, that the hundreds of millions of depositions to the reality of the new birth, were not the offspring of self-delusion, by attentively considering the variety in the stations and intellectual qualifications of the deponents. The witnesses to the miracle of regeneration, have risen up from every class and every progressive grade of society. The prince and the peasant; the cultivator of science and the tiller of the soil; the mathematician and the mechanic; the poet and the philosopher; the ardent and the dispassionate; the enthusiast and the stoic; the recluse and the man

* Hebrews xi. 4.

of the world; the barbarous and the civilized; have all attested the prodigy of regenerating grace wrought in their own souls. And were all these witnesses, so diverse in social grade, in intellectual cast, in mental acquisitions, in temperament of the heart, the victims alike of protracted self-delusion? Were the walkers with God of the early East, deceivers of themselves from the time of their supposed conversions to the hours of their deaths? Were the holy melodies of Jesse's son but the aberrations of a mind diseased? Were the prophetic visions of the rapt seers but the hallucinations of distempered imaginations? Did the fishermen of Judea but dream when they thought they saw the transfiguration on the mount, and felt in their own souls the illumination of the Holy Ghost? Was Stephen in a trance only, when, praying for his murderers, he "looked up steadfastly into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God?"* Was Paul—the accomplished scholar—the profound thinker—the overpowering reasoner—the more than Demosthenes of sacred eloquence—but an insane enthusiast from his journey to Damascus until his death of torture

* Acts vii. 55.

in the gardens of Nero? Has every soldier in the glorious army of martyrs been led to the cross, the lions, the rack, or the stake, spell-bound in a delusion of his own forging? Over the sublime intellects of Paschal, and Grotius, and Boyle, and Newton, and Hale, and Edwards, and Wilberforce, and Chalmers, did an eclipse unceasingly hang, from the time of their spiritual renovations, gathering increasing darkness as they approached the portal of everlasting rest?

The prodigy of regeneration utterly annihilates the bold assumption, that miracles are opposed to the experience of mankind. With the miraculous phenomenon of the new birth—to which all other deviations from the established laws of nature were but subordinate and subsidiary—human experience has been familiar for thousands of years. From the days of John Knox, Scotland itself had been distinguished by copious effusions of the Holy Ghost. Hume lived, and blasphemed, and died, in the midst of signs and wonders. Had he cast aside the discolored and distorting glasses of unbelief, he must have seen, even in his own native land, abounding demonstrations of the chief of miracles. Since his era, the great renovating prodigy has achieved triumphs matched only by those of the apostolic

age. Regenerating grace is the almighty sceptre of the Prince of peace, by which, in the fulness of time, he will miraculously accomplish all the glorious purposes of his incarnation, and extend his dominion “from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth.”*

* Psalms lxxii. 8.

CHAPTER XV.

THE MORAL INCONGRUITIES OF MAN.

Man in his moral being destitute of harmony of organization belonging to other creations of God—Is compound of meanness and majesty—at once brutal and godlike—Elements of his contrarious nature in collision with each other—Philosophy could not explain the enigma—Bible explains it—Man made upright and pure—but sinned and fell—Thoughts on the apostasy—The fall the only solution of the mysteries of our being—Sin unnatural evil—Usurper of human heart—Man an enemy to God—hence he takes his name in vain—and worships idols—Man not originally made a God-hater by God himself—Conscience and sin not twin brothers of the same birth—Gospel's solution of mysteries of our being, proof of its divinity—Cause suggested of God's delay in final punishment of sin.

IN the constituents of humanity there is not found the harmony of organization discoverable in the structure of inferior animals. The lord of this lower world is compounded of heterogeneous and jarring elements. Of him the great poet of nature said; “ What a piece of work is man! how noble in reason! how infinite in faculties! in form and moving how express and admirable! in action how like an angel! in apprehension how like a God!” The poetic picture is truthful. So is the delineation of man in the scriptural pages, where he is

represented as saying, "to corruption, Thou art my father ; to the worm, Thou art my mother and my sister."* With the tiger's ferocity, he commingles "the milk of human kindness ;" he is a strange compound of meanness and of majesty ; at once brutal and godlike. The lightning of heaven has become his submissive apprentice. And yet this master of the oak-cleaving bolt has bowed himself down in abject worship to stocks and stones, to "birds and four-footed beasts, and creeping things."

Man is an anomaly in the creation. In all the other visible works of God, harmony of organization is the distinctive feature. It imparts majesty and grace to each wheeling orb of the solar and stellar systems ; it forms the music of the spheres. As we pass downward to the humblest thing that lays claim to animal life, we find harmony of organization in each descending grade. Every bird that wings the air, every four-footed beast that roams the field, every fish that swims the sea, every worm that crawls upon the earth, is perfect "after his kind." In the vegetable province, too, harmony of organization is stamped on every tree, shrub, plant and flower, as the sure signet of the almighty hand. Even in the mineral kingdom, each substance proclaims, by the

* Job xvii. 14.

harmony of its organization, that God is its author. From this great law of nature, man is a mysterious exception. In him wild disorder ever reigns; between the bestial and the divine elements of his being, an intestine warfare is ceaselessly maintained.

Thus heterogeneous and discordant in his composition, man is "like the troubled sea when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt."* The ox, when he has satisfied his hunger, and slaked his thirst, deliberately chews the cud of contentment as he reposes under the shade of the spreading oak. Contentment awaits not the lord of the lower creation. Ambition proclaims, "It is not in me;" the wealth of Crœsus could not buy it; the cottage knows it not, and it is a stranger to the palace. Heathen philosophy once sought to explain the phenomenon of our contrarious nature by the supposition that each of human kind has two distinct souls, the one inclined to soar, and the other to sink; the one bent on the abject, the other aspiring to the sublime. The Persian Zoroaster vainly endeavored to solve the enigma by placing over the race of mortals two ruling and discordant deities, personifying respectively the two opposing principles of good and of evil.

* Isaiah lvii. 20.

The contrarieties of humanity constitute a prodigy at which philosophy has gazed and wondered ever since she began to think. But with all her boasted sagacity, she was unable to expound the marvel. Without Revelation's clue man stands forth, in the midst of the wonders of the visible universe, himself the greatest wonder. It is the Bible alone that can instruct him in the deep and dark mysteries of his own being. The scriptural solution is a simple one. It announces that in the beginning God breathed into his nostrils the breath of life from the pure fountain of his own vitality ; that, made in the image, and after the likeness of his Creator, man speedily apostatized and fell from his primeval state of innocence ; and that sin

"Brought death into the world and all our woe."

That man is now a sinful creature, is a truth written, as it were, with a sunbeam upon the tablets of the human heart. Candor must needs read it there if she will but turn her vision inward. That God is a wise and holy being is another truth which the modern skeptic will not presume to deny. Revelation, though it touches not the heart, must, nevertheless, enlighten the understanding of all who are brought up in a christian land. None thus enlight-

ened dare venture to predicate of the Ruler of the universe the vices and follies imputed to its fabulous deities by ancient polytheism. Modern infidelity, educated in a christian country, has not the courage to be altogether pagan. She is obliged, however reluctantly, to array her god in the attributes of wisdom and holiness. Instead of degrading him to the rank of Jupiter or Mars, her very pride leads her to claim for him affinity in moral perfections to the Jehovah of the Bible.

As, then, the Ruler of the universe is a being of infinite wisdom and holiness, reason itself must infer that he would not with his own right hand have formed a race of sinful creatures, and fitted up for their inheritance this fair province of the universal empire. Not even an earthly prince would voluntarily incorporate into his kingdom a colony of men so utterly depraved as to render it certain that they must become disturbers of his peace and rebels against his authority. Treason is a weed that may spring up in the goodliest soil; but a wise and righteous governor would not of his own free choice transplant it into the heart of his dominions. The supposition that God was the original author of sin, is a libel upon his acknowledged perfections. The scriptural account of the primitive innocence

of human kind is, therefore, confirmed by the deductions of enlightened reason.

If, then, man came pure and perfect from the hands of his Creator, whence arose the fearful apostasy which stained the earliest pages of secular history, and has changed the paradise of earth into a vast chaos of moral ruins? This is an enigma which reason could never have solved. But reason, enlightened by the Bible, ought to perceive and feel the justness of the inspired solution. Man fell, because man was created a free agent. From the like cause fell the angels. The celestial spirits "which kept not their first estate," and the primeval ancestors of our race, became sinners, not by creation or from compulsive destiny, but from their own spontaneous choice.

And how could infinite wisdom and infinite holiness have prevented the catastrophe either in heaven or on earth, except by abridging the freedom of creature volition? But without freedom of volition, angels and men would have been only machines. God made his creatures to worship and serve their Creator. But how could they have rendered him acceptable worship or service without freedom of will? What pleasure would the Infinite Spirit have derived from the incense or

hallelujahs of mere breathing, moving, speaking machinery? It is the will that constitutes the essence of piety below and of holiness above. But there can be no exercise of the will where liberty of choice is wanting. If sin emanated from the abuse of the freedom of creature volition, the abridgment of that freedom would, doubtless, have caused a greater evil in the empire of God. Liberty is the choicest boon imparted by the Creator to his intelligent creation. It constitutes the charm of earth and the bliss of heaven. Doubtless Gabriel was just as free as the prince of darkness to have apostatized. We suppose that nothing created, save those purchased by the blood of Christ, is secure against the possibility of falling.

Unbelief has cavilled at the hypothesis of Adam's posterity suffering from the delinquency of their primitive ancestors. But how could that consequence have been averted? The sin of Eden radically polluted the stock of humanity in all its elements, physical and moral. The children of that polluted lineage, necessarily participated of its impurities; they were the natural heirs of the ills of which sin was the prolific parent; nothing but a miracle could have saved them from falling with the stock from whence they issued. By the sure

course of nature, Ethiopians must be born of Ethiopians. Had spiritual generation been ordained for hell, devils must needs have begotten devils. Spirits of light and of holiness could not have sprung from the foul embraces of fiends.

Man's apostasy from pristine holiness, is the only key that can unlock the mysteries of his present condition. In strict accordance with the scriptural narrative of his original innocence and subsequent fall are the existing phenomena of our being. The proofs of some great spiritual convulsion in the moral world, are no less cogent than the proofs of some great physical convulsions in the natural. In the chaos of fallen humanity, relics are everywhere to be found of its primeval grandeur. Though a ruined creature, man is majestic even in ruins. The fall has impaired, but not utterly effaced, the divine image stamped on him at his creation. Hence his lofty, though unsatisfied aspirations; hence earth's inability to fill his capacious soul; hence his ceaseless longings after immortality, even where the Gospel never beamed, and where the grave had cast its impenetrable shade over the undiscovered country beyond it.

How noble must have been that being for whom God spent six days in creating a world! Yet with

the pristine divinity of our nature, sin has commingled its own debasing alloy ; and he who is the “ wisest, brightest,” is also the “ meanest” animal of the visible universe. The riddle of mortality has been the marvel of almost sixty centuries ; its labyrinths can be explored only by the lamp of Revelation. Aided by that lamp, the explorer, though he may doubt whether it was lighted from above, will find the vestiges of the fall even more palpable than the vestiges of the flood. The volume of human nature echoes back the truth of the Volume of Grace.

The candid inquirer, if he will carefully dissect and examine the constituent elements of sin, must discover intrinsic proofs that it was an usurper of the human heart, and not its original sovereign.

Sin is an unnatural evil. It is an intruder into our sphere. In all her works nature teaches obedience to superior power. Each planet of the solar system obeys the parent sun ; the parent sun himself, with all his train of satellites, yields fealty to some mightier orb ; the whole panorama of worlds hails the benignant domination of their common Architect. As we pass downward to the inferior ranks of animal existence, we still find obedience to superior power the paramount law of nature. In

the brute creation instinct is heaven's vicegerent ; and from its ruling sway where is the bird, or four-footed beast, or creeping thing that withholds its allegiance ? The analogies of the visible creation confirm the scriptural teaching, that this first and universal law of nature was incorporated into the original organization of man. Nor was his subsequent rebellion against rightful sovereignty less unnatural and monstrous than would be the phenomenon

“Should earth unbalanced from her orbit fly,
Planets and suns run lawless through the sky.”

Sin is enmity to God. Disguise it as he will, the unregenerate man is a foe to his Creator. He may view with complacency a poetic deity of his own fashioning ; he might have loved the Bacchus or the Mars, the Venus or the Minerva of pagan mythology ; but from a God of awful justice, inflexible truth, and immaculate holiness, “that will by no means clear the guilty,” his spirit turns away in terror and aversion. In open breach of the divine command, he wantonly takes God's holy name in vain. This offence to the personal dignity of heaven's King lacks even the miserable plea of temptation. It gratifies no passion ; it satiates no lust ; it

is but the spontaneous outbreak of ever-restless animosity against the High and Holy One. Had the heathen code forbidden the familiar use of the name of Jove, the interdiction would have found no opposition in the carnal heart. We are not wont to utter without veneration the name of a Howard or a Washington. But in defiance of the terrors of Sinai, the name of the august Ancient of Days is made, in christian lands, the jest of the public street, and the seasoner of bar-room ribaldry.

Idolatry is the lineal offspring of deep-rooted hostility to Jehovah. It is an offence of the heart, rather than of the head. The nations became idolaters, not so much from sottishness of intellect, as because "they did not like to retain God in their knowledge." Men bowed down to stocks and to stones, to leeks and to onions, less in ignorance, than in contempt of that omnipresent Essence, in whom they lived, and moved, and had their being; whom they heard in the warbling grove, and in the thunder's roar; whom they saw in every green, and every snow-clad field, in each clear evening's canopy, and in each bright morning's sun.

And was this deadly enmity to its Creator an original element of the human soul? Was man in his primeval organization made a God-hater by God

himself? Did Infinite Holiness form a new world, and light up its “queen of night,” and its “king of day,” for the accommodation of a race of intelligencies, constituted rebels, blasphemers, and idolaters, by the fundamental laws of their being? Such a supposition would impugn alike the principles of revealed and of natural theism. The oracles of reason, and the oracles of Revelation, conduct to the self-same conclusion. God made man upright and holy, but sin beguiled and destroyed him. In the beginning the Lord of the harvest sowed good wheat in his fields; yet tares sprung up and choked it. And when we behold the poisonous weeds covering and desolating the face of the earth, we must in candor say, as the Lord himself said in the Gospel parable, “an enemy hath done this.”

Conscience is an element of man, unknown to the subordinate creation. It is an active and powerful principle of human nature, forming often the check of vice, where no other restraint could operate. It was ordained the sentinel of heaven in the bosom of mortals. Outliving the ravages of the great moral destroyer, it has existed in every age, and been felt in every land. The contrariety between conscience and sin, strongly indicates that they were not twin brothers, brought into being by

the same effort of creative power. Their discordant qualities betray a diversity of origin; the one bears the mark of heaven, the other the stamp of hell. Unbiased reason must perceive and feel the scriptural truth, that it was the fall which introduced sin into our sphere, while conscience is a surviving ray of the divinity originally imparted to the lord of the terrestrial creation.

There is a completeness in the scriptural solution of our contrarious state, which proves the solution to be the work of God. It bears no marks of human littleness or contrivance. It possesses an originality, grandeur, simplicity, and truthfulness, demonstrative of its heavenly source. Reason itself, enlightened though unregenerated by the Bible, must perceive that a creature, originally formed in the divine image, and subsequently corrupted and debased by sin, would be likely to exhibit the same discordant phenomena everywhere exhibited by the generations of men. And such a creature must of necessity be restless as the troubled sea. At enmity with his Maker, it would be impossible that he should be in amity with himself.

The scriptural explanation of the enigma of our moral condition, is decisive proof that the Bible was inspired by God. Sound was the logic of the

Samaritan woman, when, leaving her water-pot at Jacob's well, she went into the city and proclaimed to her astonished acquaintance, "Come see a man which told me all things that ever I did: is not this the Christ?"* His startling communications well attested the presence of one who knew the secrets of the heart. But not less impervious to mortal ken were the profound mysteries of our contrarious nature. Had the Bible been sustained by no miraculous demonstrations, and had it contained no other preternatural revelation, its solution of these otherwise inexplicable mysteries would have authenticated its claim to divinity.

Profane history has recorded that, in the first century of Christianity, the superb cities of Pompeii and Herculaneum were buried fathoms deep by a sudden eruption of Vesuvius. The calamity was contrary to experience; the cities had passed scathless through fourteen centuries, without any unfriendly demonstration from their seemingly peaceful neighbor. Nor has the mountain since disgorged a fiery deluge of the like awful magnitude. Skeptical philosophy, bound by its creed to reject whatever is opposed to experience, might,

* John iv. 29.

perhaps, ere this, have begun to regard the appalling narrative of the volcanic devastation as a fable, or at least an exaggeration of the olden time, had not its truth been confirmed by modern excavations. The exploration of the discovered ruins, demonstrates the melancholy catastrophe and former magnificence of the buried towns.

Before unbelief finally rejects the scriptural account of the original perfection and subsequent apostasy of man, let her profoundly meditate upon the moral ruins of our race, so strangely compounded of the celestial and the grovelling. How dissimilar is this heterogeneous and contrarious mass to the other visible works of the great Architect! Where, in its discordant elements, is to be found that harmony of organization which constitutes the unerring mark of the almighty hand. The grandeur of humanity claims kindred with the skies; its abject vileness can scarcely aspire to brotherhood with the brute. The lord of earth came not thus from the hands of his Creator. As the physical ruins of the Neapolitan cities demonstrate at once their volcanic overthrow and primeval splendor, so do the moral ruins of man betoken alike his original majesty and melancholy fall.

Another phenomenon, akin to that already dis-

cussed, consists in the fact that the race of sinful mortals have not, ere this, been utterly exterminated. The continued wickedness of man, and the long pause of retributive vengeance, present an enigma not to be explained by the light of nature. That almighty justice should have permitted open and high-handed rebellion, to enjoy for thousands of years one entire and beautiful province of the general empire, is a dark problem which reason cannot solve without an open Bible before her. It is in the history of the great atonement alone, studied by the optics of the Gospel, that she can find the solution of the otherwise unfathomable mystery.

Even in the hours of their first moral night, the star of Bethlehem shed its cheering ray on the apostate pair. Salvation has ever since been pursuing its majestic march, sometimes with silent, sometimes with resounding steps, towards its mighty consummation. Sinners have been spared that the cross might be glorified; the bolt of retribution has been delayed, that all the predicted triumphs of redeeming love might be achieved. But when the wheat of Emmanuel's harvest shall be fully gathered into the garners of blessedness, the tares sown by the prince of darkness, and springing up

with such baneful luxuriance in the rank soil of sin, shall be collected together and burned with unquenchable fire. God's mysterious forbearance in the punishment of the rebellious world, thus affords another instance where, to explain the book of nature and providence, it is needful to invoke the Book of Revelation.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE PROMULGATION OF THE GOSPEL.

Early and rapid spread of Gospel proved by Gospel itself, and by secular and ecclesiastical histories—Formidable impediments to its progress—was exclusive and uncompromising—opposed to prejudices and expectations of Jews—Country of its origin awakened prejudices of gentiles—Heathen superstition deeply entrenched in minds of nations—Retainers of polytheism roused themselves to oppose invasion of Christianity—Recoiling from open argument, they employed foulest slanders—Polytheism closely interwoven with civil government—which was invoked and came to her rescue—Roman empire embraced whole civilized world—Sufferings in Nero's gardens specimens of other sufferings—General population joined in persecuting Christians—Intrinsic impediments Gospel had to encounter—Opposed to pride, passions, and propensities of fallen man—Gospel made the moral reformation of its votaries a test of its truth—and that in an age of universal corruption—Human instrumentality employed in spread of Gospel inadequate to exigency—its promulgators a few Jewish peasants—the most despised members of a despised nation—Contrast between martial conquests and the conquests achieved by Gospel.

THE book entitled “The Acts of the Apostles,” was not composed and embodied in the Sacred Canon merely to gratify historical curiosity. Prompted by the Holy Ghost, it was designed to show that God, by miraculously aiding the dissemination of the faith of Jesus Christ, recognized it as

divine. The Gospel is its own witness to its wonderful spread. The earliest record of the triumphs of primitive Christianity is found in the Inspired Volume. We may, therefore, for the purposes of our argument, classify the promulgation of the Gospel among its internal evidences, without any reprehensible invasion of the extraneous department of the christian proofs.

In the first chapter of "The Acts," the historian states that, at the time of the ascension, the number of the disciples assembled was about one hundred and twenty. In the second chapter he affirms, that at the season of pentecost, which was only ten days afterwards, three thousand converts were simultaneously added to the infant church. In the fourth chapter it appears that the number of believers had increased to "about five thousand." In the fifth chapter it is stated, "And believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women." The sixth chapter superadds, "And the word of God increased, and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith." After the twelfth chapter, the evangelical historian dwells almost exclusively upon the progress of the great apostle to the gentiles. But it is

not to be hence inferred, that the other apostles remained inactive, or that the results of their labors were unworthy to be recorded. Even the limited details contained in the book of "The Acts," show that during the twenty-eight years of which it briefly treats, the religion of the cross had pervaded Judea, Samaria, the districts of Lesser Asia, Greece, the islands of the *Æ*gean Sea, the northern coast of Africa, and even the imperial capital of all the world.

If we pass from the Sacred Pages to the writings of hostile polytheists, we find unequivocal demonstrations of the rapid advance of primitive Christianity. The celebrated passage from Tacitus, copied in a preceding chapter, bears with conclusive force upon this branch of our subject. In narrating the circumstances of Nero's conflagration, which happened in the thirtieth year after the ascension, and which the tyrant, though himself the incendiary, basely imputed to the christians, the Roman historian, after stating that they had derived their origin and name from Christ, who in the reign of Tiberius, had suffered death under the sentence of the procurator, Pontius Pilate, thus proceeds; "For a while this dire superstition was checked; but it again burst forth, and not only

spread itself over Judea, the first seat of the mischievous sect, but was even introduced into Rome, the common asylum which receives and protects whatever is impure, whatever is atrocious. The confessions of those who were seized, discovered a vast multitude of their accomplices ; and they were all convicted, not so much for the crime of setting fire to the city as for their hatred to human kind."

The expression, "vast multitude," in this passage, when used by an author so scrupulously opposed to exaggeration as Tacitus, implies, that at the time of the conflagration, the number of christians in the bosom of the Roman capital had become immense. The passage contains other significant expressions, reaching still nearer to the time of the crucifixion. "For awhile this dire superstition was checked ; but it again burst forth" and overspread Judea. The terms "burst forth," from the pen of the ever-guarded Roman annalist, indicate something more than a slow and gradual diffusion of what he styles the "dire superstition." He meant to signify that its reappearance and spread were sudden, extraordinary, prodigious. How corroborative of the scene of pentecost and of the other apostolic triumphs is the language of the heathen Tacitus !

The letter of Pliny, and the reply of the emperor, set forth at large in one of our previous chapters, are not less demonstrative of the early and wonderful progress of the Gospel. Pliny's letter was written, as we have seen, about seventy years after the ascension. He was governor of Pontus and Bithynia, two Asiatic provinces, remote from the birth-place of the new religion. He sought imperial instructions to regulate his treatment of the christians, who were overspreading the countries subject to his authority. In speaking of them he says, "Others named by an informer first affirmed and then denied the charge of Christianity; declaring that they had been christians, but had ceased to be so, some three years ago, others still longer, some even twenty years ago." Hence it appears that the evangelical faith had then been of more than twenty years' standing, in the provinces of which Pliny was procurator. He proceeds; "For the number of culprits is so great as to call for serious consultation. Many persons are informed against of every age and of both sexes, and more still will be in the same situation. The contagion of the superstition hath spread, not only through cities, but even villages and the country. Not that I think it impossible to check and to correct it. The

success of my endeavors hitherto forbids such desponding thoughts; for the temples, once almost desolate, begin to be frequented, and the sacred solemnities, which had long been intermittent, are now attended afresh; and the sacrificial victims are now sold everywhere, which could once scarce find a purchaser."

These extracts show that, within about seventy years after the ascension, the religion of the Crucified had pervaded the sequestered regions of Bithynia and Pontus; that it had made "almost desolate" the temples of the false gods; that it had caused their profane solemnities to be long "intermittent;" and that it had even rendered unsalable their "sacrificial victims." The Roman scholar speaks of "the contagion of the superstition;" thus selecting, to express the expansive power of the Gospel, some of the most potent terms known to human speech. There is no pretence that the streams of salvation had not overflowed the other provinces of the Roman empire at least as early and copiously as they did the distant countries where the sagacious Pliny had been commissioned to check the inundation.

The ecclesiastical history of the first three centuries is replete with proofs of the Gospel's aston-

ishing spread. Its triumphant march from land to land, and from continent to continent, forms the glowing theme of all the christian fathers. Take as an example the following extract from Justin Martyr, who wrote about one hundred and six years after the ascension : "There is not," says he, "a nation, either Greek or barbarian, or of any other name, even of those who wander in tribes and live in tents, among whom prayers and thanksgivings are not offered to the Father and Creator of the Universe, by the name of the crucified Jesus." Take as another example the following extract from Clement of Alexandria, who wrote about fifty-five years after Justin Martyr. He says, "The philosophers were limited to Greece, and their particular retainers; but the doctrine of the Master of Christianity was not circumscribed to Judea, but spread throughout the whole world, in every nation, and village, and city, both of Greeks and barbarians, converting separate individuals and whole houses; having already brought over to the truth not a few of the philosophers themselves. If the Greek philosophy is interdicted by law, it immediately disappears; whereas, though from the first appearance of Christianity, kings and tyrants, governors and presidents, with their whole train,

and with the populace on their side, have endeavored with their whole force to exterminate it, yet doth it flourish more and more." None will deny that, early in the fourth century, the once despised and persecuted faith of the cross ascended the throne of the Cæsars, and became the established religion of the Roman empire.

Further proofs of the rapid and wide diffusion of Christianity, long ere it grasped the imperial sceptre, would be useless. Its astounding spread was the wonder of the world. It bears on its face the impress of the Omnipotent. But the assurance of divine agency in the early promulgation of the Gospel, will be rendered "doubly sure" by an examination of the formidable impediments it had to encounter, and the feebleness of the human means employed for its advancement.

The impediments interposed to the primitive spread of our holy religion, would have appalled and confounded the stoutest heart, unless sustained by that heaven-born faith which, like its sister charity, "believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things." Christianity was exclusive and uncompromising. It waged a war not merely of conquest, but of extermination against error in its diversified modifications. Hence it drew down

upon its head the united vengeance of all the priesthoods of earth. The Jewish hierarchy exercised over the national mind controlling domination. They had immemorially taught the people to expect that the advent of the Messiah of the Old Testament would be accompanied by worldly pomp and power ; that he would break asunder the Roman yoke, and restore his country to the glories of the age of Solomon. Christianity came into direct collision with these long-cherished expectations.

Born in a manger and wrapped in its straw, the Messiah of the Gospel spent his youth and early manhood in the laborious workshop of a poor mechanic. At the commencement of his public ministrations, he selected for his companions fishermen and publicans ; he was “meek and lowly in heart ;” he had “not where to lay his head ;” he proclaimed that his “kingdom was not of this world.” No wonder that he was rejected of his countrymen. No wonder that when he appeared as a prophet in the place of his youthful domicil, “all they in the synagogue” “were filled with wrath, and rose up and thrust him out of the city, and led him unto the brow of the hill whereon their city was built, that they might cast him down headlong.”* No won-

* Luke iv. 28, 29.

der that the multitudes sometimes took up stones to stone him, and sometimes cried out, "Crucify him, Crucify him."

Yet even Tacitus affirms, that the religion of Christ, though checked for a time by his death as a malefactor, "again burst forth," and overspread Judea. To suppose that this resistless outbreak was produced by the followers of the Crucified, without almighty aid, would violate the fixed principles of the Jewish character. Nothing is more inflexible than Hebrew prejudice. If any one doubts the truth of this position, let him attempt to christianize an Israelite of the present day by the force of reasoning. The granite of the Jewish heart, like the rock of Horeb, would have been penetrated only by a rod of heavenly temperament.

As it entered the domains of polytheism the Gospel encountered hindrances no less formidable. In gentile estimation, the place of its origin tainted it with suspicion. Greek, Roman, and barbarian united in their common detestation of the Hebrew race. They deemed Palestine the birth-place and the home of superstitions, alike hostile to earth and to heaven. Any theological creed emanating from that despised and abhorred land must have sunk under its own weight, if sustained only by human

instrumentality. But national prejudice was not the chief obstacle that impeded the introduction of Christianity into pagan countries.

It is a fallacy to suppose that its ancient superstition sat lightly upon the heathen world. Though rejected by some few skeptical philosophers, it had fastened itself upon the hearts of the millions as with hooks of steel. "The religion of the nations," says Gibbon, "was not merely a speculative doctrine, professed in the schools or preached in the temples. The innumerable deities and rites of polytheism were closely interwoven with every circumstance of business or pleasure, of public or of private life; and it seemed impossible to escape the observance of them, without at the same time renouncing the commerce of mankind, and all the offices and amusements of society."* The lares and penates, those divinities of the fire-side, were endeared to the soul by the tenderest associations. The pagan faith was associated with the loved memory of the dead, supposed to be in the fruition of its fabled elysium. Poetry, painting and sculpture had combined to deck it in all their charms. It went with its votaries to their haunts of amuse-

* Gibbon, vol. ii. pp. 285, 286.

ment. The public games, shows, processions, and festivals were essential parts of the religion of the state, designed no less for the honor of the gods than for the entertainment of men. The priests of idolatry were supported by the rents of consecrated lands, and by liberal contributions from the public treasury; they were gorgeously clothed in robes of purple, rolled in magnificent chariots, and ravished the people with frequent and sumptuous feasts. Polytheism was the patroness of the arts, fine and mechanical. She munificently rewarded the painter and the sculptor, and gave employment and bread to the humbler trades that subserved idolatrous worship.

The satellites, retainers, and dependants of the ancient faith, roused all their energies to rescue their nursing mother from the inroad of the Gospel. Christianity had denounced her oracles, sought to prostrate her altars, proclaimed her priests to be impostors and her gods to be devils. It was a struggle for life. Polytheism must destroy her invading foe or be herself destroyed. From the open field of honest argument, the votaries of superstition recoiled; they insidiously resorted to the grossest misrepresentations; they invoked the basest slanders; they contaminated the air with the foulest

calumnies; they endeavored to inflict mortal wounds by arrows dipped in the deadliest poison. Take the following as a sample of the atrocious libels with which they sought to overwhelm the infant church. Of its holy feast of the eucharist, "It was asserted that a new-born infant entirely covered over with flour was presented, like some mystic symbol of initiation, to the knife of the proselyte, who unknowingly inflicted many a secret and mortal wound on the innocent victim of his error; that as soon as the cruel deed was perpetrated, the sectaries drank up the blood, greedily tore asunder the quivering members, and pledged themselves to eternal secrecy by a mutual consciousness of guilt."*

Polytheism was closely interwoven with the government of the state. The sacerdotal offices were sought and held by the most illustrious citizens; the blood of royalty was often commingled with the blood of the priesthood. Religion had pervaded all the concerns of life, public as well as private. War was not declared or peace concluded without the sanction of augury and the solemnities of sacrifice, in which the magistrate, the senator, and the soldier

* Gibbon, vol. ii. p. 388.



were obliged to participate. The oracles of superstition were believed to command the secrets of fate. Success in arms was celebrated by thanksgiving to the Olympian divinities; national calamities were to be averted by fasting and humiliation. The hierarchy were supposed to be the sole mediators between earth and heaven. An alliance defensive and offensive had immemorially existed between idolatry and the civil government. Pressed by the invasion of Christianity, polytheism imploressingly invoked the sympathy and protecting arm of the sovereign power. Nor was the invocation in vain.

At the time of the crucifixion, and for ages afterwards, the Roman empire embraced the whole civilized world. Its despot ruled with a rod of iron, from the Euphrates to the Western Ocean, and from the frozen north to the regions of the equator. Stimulated by the pagan priesthood the imperial government employed, for three centuries, its colossal power to extinguish forever the christian name. Its auxiliaries were the dungeon, the cross, the flames, and the fury of wild beasts. To its almost omnipotent might it superadded a sort of terrestrial omnipresence. For where, save "in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of

the earth,"* could the hunted saints find refuge from its destroying wrath?

If the tremendous realities of the persecutions inflicted on the faithful by pagan Rome, are not vividly impressed on the recollection of the reader, let him turn once more to the passage we have transcribed from Tacitus. That heathen author thus describes the sufferings of the christians under Nero. "They died in torments, and their torments were embittered by insult and derision. Some were nailed on crosses; others sewed up in the skins of wild beasts and exposed to the fury of dogs; others again, smeared over with combustible materials, were used as torches to illuminate the darkness of the night." If it be urged that Nero was a cruel tyrant, and that no general inference can be drawn from his example, we turn to the persecutions under the benevolent Trajan, and his classic governor. In his letter to the emperor, hereinbefore set forth, Pliny states, that he had uniformly put to death all christians who refused to renounce their faith, and execrate their Redeemer, and that to extort the secrets of the sect, he had deemed it fitting "to inquire BY TORTURE from two females, who

* Hebrews xi. 38.

who were said to be deaconesses"—doubtless venerable for their age as well as for their piety. And we have seen that his imperial master commences his reply with these memorable words, " You have done perfectly right, my dear Pliny."

The Roman government, and the immediate retainers of polytheism, were not the only actors in the long drama of persecution. For ages the general population of the empire adhered to the ancient faith, and joined the powers of despotism in chasing down as animals of prey the unoffending christians. Sometimes, when the civil authorities had paused in their fierce onset, the infuriated masses, impatient at the law's delay, took into their own rude hands the work of summary vengeance. Affectation of historic candor has extorted the following confession even from the pen of the infidel Gibbon :—

" In a large and tumultuous assembly," says he, " the restraints of fear and shame, so forcible on the minds of individuals, are deprived of the greatest part of their influence. The pious christian, as he was desirous to obtain or to escape the glory of martyrdom, expected either with impatience or with terror the stated returns of the public games and festivals. On those occasions the inhabitants of the great cities of the empire were collected in the circus of the theatre, where every circumstance of the place, as well as

of the ceremony, contributed to kindle their devotion and to extinguish their humanity. Whilst the numerous spectators, crowned with garlands, perfumed with incense, purified with the blood of victims, and surrounded with the altars and statues of their tutelar deities, resigned themselves to the enjoyment of pleasures which they considered as an essential part of their religious worship, they recollected that the christians alone abhorred the gods of mankind, and by their absence and melancholy on these solemn festivals, seemed to insult or to lament the public felicity. If the empire had been afflicted by any recent calamity, by a plague, a famine, or an unsuccessful war; if the Tiber had, or if the Nile had not risen beyond its banks; if the earth had shaken, or if the temperate order of the seasons had been interrupted, the superstitious pagans were convinced that the crimes and the impiety of the christians, who were spared by the excessive lenity of the government, had at length provoked the divine justice. It was not among a licentious and exasperated populace that the forms of legal proceedings could be observed; it was not in an amphitheatre, stained with the blood of wild beasts and gladiators, that the voice of compassion could be heard. The impatient clamors of the multitude denounced the christians as the enemies of gods and men, doomed them to the severest tortures, and venturing to accuse by name some of the most distinguished of the new sectaries, required with irresistible vehemence that they should be instantly apprehended and cast to the lions.”*

* Gibbon, vol. ii. pages 412, 413.

But the Gospel had intrinsic impediments even more formidable than those presented from without. These inherent impediments arose from its immaculate purity and holiness ; its humbling doctrines and precepts ; its lofty and uncompromising exactions. It was opposed to the pride and passions of fallen man ; it came into collision with all the aspirations of the carnal heart. It beguiled not proselytes by specious promises ; it plainly predicted as the earthly portion of the primitive believers, persecution, imprisonment, and martyrdom. These were the legacies—the only sublunary legacies—it bequeathed to its faithful followers.

The first mandate of the Gospel was, "Repent." The injunction implied the charge of natural depravity. Nor did the Gospel leave to arrogant man the boast that he could repent by his own unaided volition. It exposed the feebleness as well as the turpitude of our fallen nature. At the head of mortal excellencies, it placed the lowly virtue of humility. It said to the passionate and the revengeful, "Love your enemies ;" "Bless them that curse you ;" "Whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also." To the aspirants after wealth, it proclaimed, "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth." "If thou

wilt be perfect, go and sell what thou hast and give to the poor." "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God."

To the votaries of ambition, Christianity declared, "Blessed are the poor in spirit." "Whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased, and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted." Its Founder announced to the lovers of pleasure, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me." Upon the humble ranks, so apt to repine at their allotted station, it imposed its command, "Servants, be subject to your masters with all fear, not only to the good and gentle, but also to the froward." It curbed the factious and turbulent masses by its injunction; "Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake, whether it be to the king as supreme, or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evil-doers, and for the praise of them that do well."

"The carnal mind is enmity against God." It is no less hostile to his Holy Word. The Gospel came into direct conflict with the natural heart of our whole fallen race, whether high or low, rich or poor, bond or free, rulers or ruled, learned or un-

learned. If it had not been accompanied by miraculous demonstrations of a present God, the world would unanimously have deemed it, what it was deemed by the philosophic, the profound, the else candid Tacitus, a "dire superstition;" and its abettors would, by universal acclamation, have been branded with what he termed "deserved infamy," "for their hatred of human kind." The scribes and pharisees gnashed on the Gospel with their teeth. The scribes and pharisees were but samples of apostate humanity. The intellect of the natural man may be forced to admit the lustre of evangelical light, but he can no more love that light than the diseased eye can dwell with complacency on the effulgence of the noonday sun. Had it not been divine, the Gospel could no more have turned heavenward the grovelling affections of the nations, than the descending stream can climb again the mountain height. The onward, upward progress of the despised and persecuted faith, violated the fixed laws of human nature as really as the reascension of the ocean-bound flood would violate the fixed laws of the physical universe.

The promulgation of Christianity, miraculous in itself, was attended with the auxiliary miracle of a stupendous change in the lives of the primitive

christians. It was affirmed by the Gospel, that its divine efficacy would transform its converts from habits of sinful indulgence to the practice of holiness. Upon the verity of this affirmation it rested its own truthfulness. It made the practical and thorough reformation of its proselytes a test, open and palpable, of its claim to divinity. It professed that reform of the outer man was its visible seal stamped on all its faithful followers. If for a succession of years, no impress of this seal had been discernible by the world, the Gospel must have sunk under the weight of its own falsified pretensions. "See how these christians live!" would have been the taunting exclamation of unbelief, more fatal to the progress of evangelical truth than the crosses, the flames, and the lions of its persecutors.

An imposture would never have encountered the test to which the Gospel voluntarily submitted itself. Next to changing the heart, the most arduous effort is to change the life. Some writer says that "man is a bundle of habits." The saying is true. Habits become a second nature, often more inflexible than the first. The difficulty of the transition from vice to virtue, is expressed in Scripture with a power of language peculiar to the Sacred

Oracles. "Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? then may ye also do good that are accustomed to do evil."* Yet did the Gospel achieve a revolution in the morals of human kind sudden, radical, extensive, enduring. Moral reform closely followed the footsteps of Christianity whithersoever it went in its conquering career from clime to clime.

The time and circumstances of the moral revolution, wrought by early Christianity, were peculiarly adverse to its success. Judea was then divided between the self-worshipping pharisees, who thanked God that they were not as other men, and the dissolute sadducees whose language practically was, "Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die." These two sects controlled the whole population of the country. How hostile to the pride of the one, and to the libertinism of the other, must have seemed the self-denying precepts and virtues inculcated by the Son of the carpenter and his plebeian followers!

As it entered the territories of paganism, even Christianity might have been appalled at the depth and universality of triumphant wickedness. There

* Jeremiah xiii. 23.

were giants of iniquity in those days. The wealth of conquered kingdoms, flowing for centuries into the Roman capital, had made it a vast reservoir of corruption. Its gladiatorial spectacles, where captives were forced to engage in mortal combat, perhaps brother with brother, for the amusement of assembled multitudes, had contaminated the tastes and hardened the hearts of the entire community. There lived Apicius and his luxurious followers, some of whom, in the midst of starving thousands, had not been ashamed to pay one hundred pounds sterling for a single fish, and to expend fifty thousand pounds sterling in one entertainment. There reigned Messalina, the royal wanton, whose foul example of cruelty and lust polluted the general atmosphere. From this sea of licentiousness diverged into each imperial province, copious and overflowing streams of spiritual poison. The Roman empire, comprising all the civilized regions of the earth, had, in the reigns of Tiberius, Caligula, Claudius, and Nero, become, though eminently intellectual, one vast Sodom of iniquity, without a solitary Lot, save the offspring of Christianity, to disturb the monotony of evil.

It was in this age of seemingly hopeless depravity, that the poor, illiterate, and despised pilgrims

of the cross, assumed and accomplished the mighty task of reforming the morals of the world. The scoffing nations regarded them as idiots or madmen. Upon any natural principle the growth of the christian graces in a soil so saturated with vice, was a physical impossibility. Yet upon that very soil did the christian graces spring up and spread and flourish. The conclusion is inevitable, that they were planted and watered by the hand of God. The practical holiness of the primitive christians stood prominent among the supernatural prodigies authenticating the Gospel. It was a miracle, perhaps more affecting to the heart than the healing of the sick or the stilling of the tempest.

If we contemplate the human instrumentality employed in the spread of Christianity, the demonstration of divine interposition will become still more palpable. The most wonderful feature in the history of the primitive church is, the inadequacy of its terrestrial means to the achievement of its mighty conquests. The avowed object of the Gospel, from the first, was the moral renovation of the whole human family; its "good tidings of great joy" were "to all people;" the parting mandate of its Founder enjoined that it should be preached "to every creature;" it grasped not Judea alone, but

the “thick rotundity of the world.” Its mortal agents for the accomplishment of its stupendous purpose, were a little band of Jewish peasants; of a despised nation the most despised members; “made as the filth of the earth,” “the offscouring of all things;”* without money, without learning, without friends, without arms; scarcely understanding the rudiments of their mother tongue, yet familiarly addressing every people in its own strange language.

The votaries of ambition have often sought the conquest of the world. But their march in quest of universal domination had in its train

“The neighing steed and the shrill trump,
The spirit-stirring drum, the ear-piercing fife,
The royal banner, and all quality,
Pride, pomp, and circumstance of glorious war.”

Contrast the martial array of Alexander or of Napoleon with the peaceful and humble band that followed the carpenter’s Son. Yet had the “meek and lowly” Nazarene impediments to surmount incomparably greater than those opposed to the Macedonian or to the Corsican. Slight was the effeminate resistance of oriental slaves, compared

* 1 Corinthians iv. 13.

with the fierce hostility of imperial Rome. Spring would dissolve the Russian frost; it required the blood of God to thaw into repentance the else interminable winter of the carnal heart. The empire of Philip's son survived not its founder; his modern imitator lived himself to behold the bursting of the colossal bubble for which he had madly sacrificed the lives perhaps of millions. The dominion of the Prince of peace—wide as the world—has already survived, even before attaining its glorious maturity, the lapse of eighteen hundred years. From its lofty eminence it has serenely viewed the changes of dynasties, itself unchanged; the mutations of time, itself immutable.

Viewed as a device of earth, the original evangelical enterprise was a compound of idiocy and madness. Viewed as a divine dispensation, it is in strict accordance with other gracious displays of infinite wisdom. The Almighty has been wont to accomplish his stupendous purposes by means seemingly disproportioned to their ends. It is not always in the strong wind, or the earthquake, or the fire, but oftener, perhaps, in the “still small voice,” that the Omnipotent is heard. It need not excite our special wonder, that the Word made flesh should have poured “contempt upon princes,” by

selecting as the honored instruments for disseminating his great salvation, the poor, the illiterate, the despised. "I thank thee, O Father," he exclaimed, "Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes. Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight."*

* Matthew xi. 25, 26.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE SAME SUBJECT CONTINUED.

Character of Gibbon as an historian—Would have discovered any defect in foundations of Christianity—Bound to give some cause of prodigious spread of Gospel—Denying divine agency, he assigned five causes merely human—His five causes stated—First cause—Zeal of primitive christians—Was met by counter zeal of Jews and heathens—Second cause—Doctrine of future life—Hell revealed by Gospel appalling and repulsive—Even its heaven not suited to tastes of depraved heart—Third cause—Miraculous powers ascribed to primitive church—Arrogation of such powers without their possession, a fraud easily detected—Fourth cause—Pure morals of early christians—Their pure morals proof of efficacy and truth of Gospel—Gibbon's attempt to explain their pure morals—Fifth cause—Union and discipline of christian republic—No federative union of churches until close of second century—And before then Gospel had achieved signal triumphs—No event in history parallel to primitive spread of Christianity—Imposture of Mohammed—Modern missions.

HAD his candor equalled his capacity, Edward Gibbon would have stood almost at the head of uninspired historians. His imagination was powerful, his intellect comprehensive, his memory retentive, his industry untiring. His “History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire,” occupied twenty years of the meridian of his life. It is, perhaps, the

most erudite of historical compositions. Its author was master alike of the treasures of secular and of ecclesiastical learning. His great work reached back to the birth of our Saviour, and downward almost to the era of the Reformation. Christianity met him at every stage of his progress along the track of time. No writer, lay or clerical, ever possessed a more thorough knowledge than he did of all the circumstances attending the rise and spread of our holy religion. He was moved to a searching exploration of its primitive annals by a motive not common to literary men. Though wearing the mask of friendship to the Gospel, he hated it with the most perfect hatred. He could “smile and murder while” he smiled. How little did it become the dignity of the historian and the philosopher, to substitute for the sword of the honorable combatant the stiletto of the muffled assassin !

Had there been any defect in the foundations of the christian superstructure ; had not Jesus Christ been a real personage, crucified at Jerusalem in the reign of Tiberius by the sentence of Pontius Pilate ; had not the books composing the New Testament been actually published at the time they purport to have been published—the inquisitive and vindictive infidel would have detected and exposed the impos-

ture to the contempt and execration of mankind. If anything impugning the scriptural narratives could have been gleaned from cotemporaneous history, or from any Jewish or heathen writings whatsoever, his never-sleeping rancor would have discovered and proclaimed it to the four winds of heaven.

Gibbon assumed to be the historian of advancing Christianity as well as of the declining empire. The wonderful phenomenon of the Gospel's spread was the great event of the epoch of which he wrote. As an historian and philosopher, he could not shrink from the attempt to explain its cause or causes. An effect without a cause would be an anomaly in nature. The Gospel affirmed that its rapid diffusion was wrought by the direct agency of the Holy Ghost. Denying supernatural influence, the daring skeptic assigned for the stupendous effect, which for centuries had filled the world with amazement, five causes merely human. He took issue with the great Author of the Bible. For the conflict he invoked all the energies of his proud intellect, and all the resources of his unsurpassed erudition. The natural causes which he assigned were, doubtless, the most specious that malign ingenuity could invent. To his assignment infidelity

has never attempted any amendment ; she claims no subterfuges in reserve ; her renowned champion has put forth all her strength ; upon his issue she must stand or fall. If his five causes are all found utterly wanting when weighed in the balance, the world must look to the cause assigned by the Gospel's God. For if the promulgation of the Gospel could not have been wrought by human means, it must have been achieved by divine.

The following are the five causes of the Gospel's early and rapid spread assigned by the historian of declining Rome. They are given in his own words :

" I. The inflexible, and, if we may use the expression, the intolerant zeal of the christians, derived, it is true, from the Jewish religion, but purified from the narrow and un-social spirit, which, instead of inviting, had deterred the gentiles from embracing the law of Moses. II. The doctrine of a future life, improved by every additional circumstance which could give weight and efficacy to that important truth. III. The miraculous powers ascribed to the primitive church. IV. The pure and austere morals of the christians. V. The union and discipline of the christian republic, which gradually formed an independent and increasing state in the heart of the Roman empire." *

* Gibbon, vol. ii. p. 264.

To the causes of Christianity's early progress the historian has devoted two labored chapters, amounting together to two hundred and twenty-five octavo pages. His five causes we shall examine in their order.

First.—The first of the causes assigned for the Gospel's spread, is the inflexible zeal of the primitive christians. But had they no countervailing zeal to combat? In speaking of Jewish intolerance, Gibbon himself says, “The current of zeal and devotion, as it was contracted into a narrow channel, ran with the strength, and sometimes with the fury of a torrent.”* And this rushing flood was concentrated upon the Founder of Christianity and his primeval followers. Scarcely less fierce was the ardor of the polytheists in sustaining their ancient superstition against the innovating and exclusive faith of the cross. Had the devotion of the christians consisted in impetuous zeal alone, its force would have been met and neutralized by the opposing fury of the Jews and gentiles. Zeal, to effect general and permanent conviction, requires sustaining proofs of the system it espouses; else it

* Gibbon, vol. ii. p. 266.

quickly degenerates into insane and powerless fanaticism. Religious phrenzy may pervade a single neighborhood; but how could it subdue opposing continents? It may endure for a brief generation; but how could it survive the flight of successive centuries?

Secondly.—The second of the infidel causes assigned for the early diffusion of Christianity is its more complete development of a future state. It is true that the Founder of our religion “brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel.” But if the Gospel revealed its heaven, it revealed, also, its hell. The evangelical representations of human depravity, and its fearful retributions beyond the grave, were calculated to repulse rather than to conciliate the carnal heart. Tacitus and Pliny did but body forth the spontaneous whisperings of corrupt humanity, when the former styled Christianity a “dire superstition,” and the latter spoke of its “contagion” as he would have spoken of pestilential poison.

Nor had even the christian heaven allurements for the carnal spirit. The heart must be changed before it can dwell with complacency on the pure raptures of the immediate mansion of the Most

High. An immortality of holiness might rather have repelled than attracted the polytheist. Heathen voluptuousness would have inclined to its own elysium, rather than to the everlasting companionship of the cherubim and seraphim. Had the angels conveyed to Abraham's bosom Dives instead of Lazarus, the spurner of the pious beggar might have found the consuming presence of a holy God not less intolerable than the torments which extorted from him the piercing cry for a drop of water to cool his burning tongue. The wily Arabian imposter, when he devised his sensual paradise, understood the tastes of the natural heart better than did the profound historian of the "Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire."

Thirdly.—"The miraculous powers ascribed to the primitive church," is the third cause assigned by Gibbon, for the diffusion of Christianity. When the unbeliever spoke of the ascription of supernatural powers to the church, he did not mean to intimate that the church actually possessed them. On the contrary, he ever sought with untiring assiduity the impeachment of the christian miracles; less, indeed, by open denial than by disingenuous inuendo. It was the false arrogation of miraculous

powers by the infant church, that he meant to insinuate as the third cause of the Gospel's early promulgation. He indirectly intimated, what he scarcely ventured to affirm directly, that the early heralds of the cross fraudulently beguiled their proselytes by the instrumentality of counterfeited signs and wonders.

We have, in preceding chapters, endeavored to show that the nature, circumstances, diffusion, and long continuance of the christian miracles precluded the possibility of their being deceptive ; that the immediate attendants upon our Lord must necessarily have ascertained from the evidence of their own senses whether he healed the sick, raised the dead, and cast out devils by his simple mandate ; that the Gospel claimed to be accompanied, long after the decease of its Founder, with signs and wonders, as its authenticating and sure credentials ; that it made their genuineness the test of its own truth ; that the dispersed nations, to whom it appealed, and whose fealty it challenged, would have examined its credentials with the most inquisitorial scrutiny before yielding allegiance to a new, contemned, and persecuted faith, which promised nothing on earth to its followers but privations, sufferings, and deaths of torture ; that the enemies of Christianity stood

vigilant sentinels over its alleged prodigies, ever ready and eager to expose to universal execration the least semblance of imposture ; and that those very enemies, instead of denying the fact of the christian marvels, admitted their existence and preternatural character by ascribing them to demoniac or magical agency. These topics we need not again commend to the profound consideration of the inquirer after truth.

The demonstration that the evangelical signs and wonders were not simulated, but real, will become more resistless if we consider the age and countries in which they were originally displayed to the senses of mankind. It was the Augustan age—memorable, as we have seen, for its licentiousness, yet doubtless the most intellectual, the most erudite, the most investigating, the most sceptical epoch of all antiquity. The infant Gospel confined not itself to the skirts of civilization. The chief cities of Western Asia, with Jerusalem and Antioch at their head, were scenes of its triumphs. It waved its banner over classic Greece. At the Athenian Areopagus, it confronted the Epicureans and the Stoics in the very citadel of their strength. It appeared before deputies, governors, and kings. It touched the heart of Sergius Paulus, made Felix

tremble, and almost persuaded Agrippa to be a christian. It appealed to Cæsar, and boldly challenged the scrutiny of the proud capital of all the earth.

Should a band of obscure adventurers in modern times, conspire to revolutionize the spiritual world by substituting for the existing theology of chris-tendom a new and hostile faith, which denounced the Jehovah of the Bible as an imaginary being, and his temples as the receptacles of unmeaning idolatry ; and should they, in furtherance of their impious enterprise, claim to be endowed with the gift of unknown tongues, and the power of working miracles akin to those wrought by Jesus Christ and his early apostles—what kingdoms, what states, what provinces, what cities, what villages could they beguile by their insane imposture ? It might possibly, for some brief space, and in some obscure corner, decoy by the tricks of jugglery a few of the illiterate and the credulous. But how could it induce the enlightened and the wise of different countries to believe that, in their presence and in the light of day, it had by its word, cured all manner of diseases, raised the dead to life, calmed the turbulent winds, and smoothed the waves of the angry flood ? How could such an imposture tri-

umphantly sustain the searching inquisition of time? How could it so far confound the gainsaying as to compel them to yield credence to the fact of its mighty works, and seek for them a cause in the agency of the powers of darkness?

And yet infidelity, in denying the inspiration of the Gospel, has no alternative but to hold that, in the most polished age of classic antiquity, an imposture no less startling than the one just supposed, was, by the instrumentality of fishermen, publicans, and tent-makers, spread through enlightened continents, and finally seated on the throne of the civilized world, in opposition to the corrupt passions of the carnal heart, the fierce prejudices of ancient superstitions, and the dungeon, the wheel, the stake, the cross, and the wild beasts of despotic power. Great must be the faith of the infidel! He believes what none but he would have the hardihood to believe. His alone is the morbid credulity that he would slanderously impute to the primitive christians. Infidelity requires for its aliment a faith competent to "remove" "and cast into the sea," mountains of improbability piled on mountains.

Fourthly.—“The pure and austere morals of the christians,” is the fourth cause named by the un-

believing historian for the early and wide diffusion of Christianity. That the primitive converts were distinguished by unexampled purity of life, was affirmed by every christian writer of antiquity, and disputed by no cotemporaneous author, Jewish or heathen. Thus established by universal and constant asseveration on the one part, and by the total absence of denial on the other, the spotless virtue of christian professors in the first age of the church has become an historic truism, to which even skepticism is forced to yield unwilling credence. Had the learned industry of Gibbon been able to cast over the fact the twilight of peradventure, he would not have assigned it as one of the five causes of the mightiest revolution the world has ever beheld.

But the sneering infidel seems to have regarded the purity of the infant church with little more complacency than did the father of evil the innocence of Eden. Compelled to admit the great outward change in the lives of the primitive faithful, he directed his wily efforts to neutralize the just inference resulting from that change. He insidiously adopts, though he affects to reprobate, what he terms the "very ancient reproach," "that the christians allured into their party the most atrocious criminals, who, as soon as they were touched by a

sense of remorse, were easily persuaded to wash away in the water of baptism the guilt of their past conduct, for which the temples of the gods refused to grant them any expiation.”* And in the next page he adds; “After the example of their divine master, the missionaries of the gospel disdained not the society of men, and especially of women, oppressed by the consciousness, and very often by the effects of their vices. As they emerged from sin and superstition to the glorious hope of immortality, they resolved to devote themselves to a life not only of virtue, but of penitence. The desire of perfection became the ruling passion of their soul; and it is well known that, while reason embraces a cold mediocrity, our passions hurry us with rapid violence over the space which lies between the most opposite extremes.” As an auxiliary motive to reformation, the historian suggests the clanship of the early believers, which prompted them to the most rigid strictness of life for the credit of their sect.†

Thus, according to the theory of Gibbon, the confessed purity of the primitive christians was owing, primarily, to the natural workings of atro-

* Gibbon, vol. ii. p. 311.

† Ibid. 312, 313.

cious but relenting guilt, which, casting forth its victims from its own dark recesses, hurried them with a sort of volcanic impulse to the contrary excess of engrossing sanctity; and, secondarily, to the desire of the new converts to acquire reputation for the society of which they had become the members.

The accusation, professedly disapproved, yet sneeringly indorsed by Gibbon, "that the christians allured into their party the most atrocious criminals," and which he proffers in solution of the admitted virtue of the early converts, deserves more than a passing notice. It has some shades of truth, mixed with many shades of disingenuous falsity. It is true that Christianity often displayed the infinitude of its mercy by descending to the ranks of the most profligate offenders. Our blessed Lord once touched with saving penitence the heart of the expiring thief; he once cast out seven devils from the woman who had been a notorious offender. But it was not the dissolute alone "that the christians allured into their party." Neither Saul of Tarsus, nor Cornelius, nor Sergius Paulus, nor Dionysius the Areopagite, nor the converts of the household of Cæsar, were "atrocious criminals." The faith of the cross freely proffered its great sal-

vation, without distinction or exception, to the whole fallen race.

Had the Gospel, with its profession of reforming all its proselytes, been an impious forgery, its crafty fabricators would not have voluntarily essayed the stony hearts of confirmed criminals, lest by failure they should directly falsify its profession. Reformation of profligate habits, fixed by time, is almost as difficult as the restoration of vitality to the dead. Adroit fabricators of a wicked deception, arrogating to itself the character of truth, would never have hazarded the success of their enterprise on the perilous experiment of reclaiming veterans in iniquity. How feeble the prospect of even temporary reform! How imminent the jeopardy of speedy, irrecoverable relapse, involving in ruinous discredit the rash pretenders to extraordinary powers!

The Gospel claimed to possess, in its regenerating and sanctifying influences, an infallible remedy for healing the leprosy of moral evil. If the Gospel was a fabrication, its sagacious contrivers knew that their vaunted remedy was but a deceptive nostrum, and that its failure on public trial would be likely to overwhelm them in hopeless confusion. They would, therefore, have been most wary in the

choice of subjects for the decisive experiment. If they selected subjects of blameless lives, the failure of their nostrum might perchance be the less palpable and conclusive. Why then should they peril their enterprise and their character on the forlorn hope of reclaiming hardened iniquity? Why should they strive to change the Ethiopian's skin, or the leopard's spots? Medical empiricism, arrogating infallibility, would avoid cases of hopeless ailment. Moral empiricism claiming a sovereign specific for universal reform, would, in like manner, eschew cases of gross and reckless licentiousness, where amendment could not be achieved without impugning the settled principles of apostate humanity. The very fact, then, that the early christian missionaries so often and so fearlessly grappled with "the most atrocious criminals," as fit subjects for what they proclaimed the infallibly reclaiming medicine of the Gospel, is proof of their own full assurance that the medicine was of divine efficacy.

Motives founded in the pride of clanship could not have materially contributed, as Gibbon would insinuate, to the matchless virtues of the primeval believers. They must have commenced their moral career before they could have gained admission to the evangelical brotherhood. Their refor-

mation preceded their admission, instead of being its effect. And when in the history of our race has the pride of clanship voluntarily endured a life of privation, penury and suffering; the spoiling of goods; the poisoned darts of calumny; the rending of the warm ties that bind the heart to kindred, and to the loved companions of early youth? When has it inspired its possessors with the high resolve of joyously submitting to be sawn asunder with saws; torn limb from limb by wild horses; consumed by slow fires; rent in pieces by ravenous beasts; nailed to the protracted death agonies of the cross? When has such zeal for party, so insanely chivalrous, so recklessly self-abandoning, ever overspread a hemisphere, and descended through successive generations?

Thus abortive were the efforts of the learned and eloquent unbeliever to detect any mixture of alloy in the pure gold of primeval christian sanctity. The holiness embodied in the lives of the primitive faithful, must have been an emanation faint indeed, yet genuine, of the Holiness that dwells "between the cherubims." Where, in the multitudinous annals of polytheism can be found traces of any great moral reform pervading the masses of society, and reaching from country to country, from clime to

clime, and from generation to generation? What has infidelity at any time done to meliorate the hearts or the habits of human kind? How has it come to pass that the only resurrection of the nations from the grave of sin to a life of virtue, ever witnessed in the flight of time, was achieved by the benignant influences, the serene potency of the Gospel? The stupendous change wrought by Christianity in the morals of apostate humanity is instinct with demonstration of its celestial origin.

The medicine of the Gospel of Jesus Christ for restoring to virtue our fallen race was not compounded in the laboratories of earth. Its vital element is the blood of the Son of God. It has from the beginning healed all who were willing to be made whole. Nor has hardened guilt been able to elude or to resist it. It has reclaimed the sottishly intemperate, assuaged to lamb-like gentleness the fury of the homicide, restored to the practice of the chaste virtues the inmate of the brothel. During the miraculous age it wrought astounding prodigies in the reformation of vast kingdoms and continents. The lofty and pure morality of the primitive christians is a phenomenon at which infidelity has gazed and wondered for eighteen centuries. Nor did the great reforming medicine of the Gospel lose its ef-

ficacy with the termination of the miraculous epoch. Though less magnificent in its displays, it has, even to the present day, unceasingly spread its purifying and healing influences, like the gentle dews of heaven, upon every province, village, palace, and cottage of christendom.

Fifthly.—The fifth cause assigned by Gibbon for the spread of the Gospel, is “the union and discipline of the christian republic, which,” says he, “gradually formed an independent state in the heart of the Roman empire.” But, upon his own showing, no federative union of the christian churches existed, until near the close of the second century; and previous to that time the faith of the cross had achieved its most wonderful triumphs. During the apostolic age each congregation of believers was distinct and independent, connected with its sister churches only by the general ties of a common faith. Its officers were a bishop, presbyters, and deacons. Equality and independence formed the basis of its organization. Even its bishop was constantly reminded by the humbleness of his duties, that he was one of the successors of Him who had washed his disciples feet. Gibbon himself alleges that “such was the mild and equal constitution by which the

christians were governed more than a hundred years after the death of the apostles.”*

And this was the palmy state of Christianity. Justin Martyr, who wrote about the year one hundred and forty, affirmed, as we have already seen, that it had then spread into every country of the known world, whether civilized or barbarous. To impute the primeval success of Christianity to the federative union of the churches, which did not exist until near sixty years after Justin Martyr wrote, is to make the alleged effect precede its assigned cause—an absurdity in reasoning not without parallels in infidel logic. The discipline of the churches had for its object the orthodoxy and purity of their own respective members. Its influence was but indirect and reflective in spreading the Gospel among the nations.

Towards the close of the second century, and after Christianity had made gigantic strides in the spiritual conquest of the world, provincial synods were instituted. They originated in Greece and Asia Minor, and seem to have been suggested by the example of the Amphyctions, the Achæan league, and the assemblies of the Ionian cities.

* Gibbon, vol. ii. p. 328.

They soon extended throughout the empire; and it became the general custom for the bishops to meet for consultation in the capitals of their respective provinces, during the seasons of spring and autumn. A correspondence was established between the local synods, and the proceedings of each were regularly communicated to all. But the federative churches had no funds, except such as had been contributed for domestic charities; no missionaries were in their pay; no temporal force was at their beck; the strong arm of civil power was constantly uplifted against them. It is to be borne in mind, that no general council was held until after Christianity had ascended the imperial throne. The first general council of christendom was that of Nice, convened by Constantine the Great, in the year three hundred and twenty-five. The chief human instrument in the hands of the Holy Ghost for the primitive diffusion of Christianity, was the lonely pilgrim, who, like the Saint of Tarsus, traversed mountains and deserts, kingdoms and continents, in the midst of privations, scoffings, and perils, working with his own hands, lest he should be chargeable to the churches.

Thus it appears that the learned, eloquent, and profound historian of "The Decline and Fall of the

Roman Empire," has totally failed in his colossal effort to discover causes merely human for the phenomenon of the Gospel's promulgation. His failure was no less signal than that of the essay of the giants to scale the heavens. Should all its other miracles be blotted from the Sacred Record, that of its early, rapid, and extensive spread against such fearful obstacles, extraneous and inherent, without earthly means to impel it onward, would remain a monument of its celestial lineage, immovable and commanding as the everlasting mountains. The sudden dispersion of the thick darkness of the nations before the morning rays of the moral Sun, was no less demonstrative of almighty agency than was the first coming forth of

"The powerful king of day
Rejoicing in the east."

The history of the world contains no event bearing similitude to the original spread of the Gospel. Mohammed disavowed the power of working signs and wonders, and thus sagaciously avoided the quicksands in which Christianity must inevitably have perished, had its claim to miracles been false. As a mere teacher, he signally failed. With every advantage of birth, connections, talents, education,

and address, the arts of persuasion gained him in the first three years of his enterprise, only fourteen converts. During the next ten years the progress of his mission continued to be hesitating and slow. About the close of that period, political intrigue obtained for him the sovereignty of the neighboring city of Medina. This acquisition transformed the obsequious instructor into the military chieftain. In the subsequent revelations, of which he pretended to be the recipient, the prophet of Medina ventured upon a fiercer and more sanguinary tone than had been assumed by the preacher of Mecca.

His now bolder creed was calculated to arouse all the energies of martial frenzy. In addition to the four wives allowed to the ordinary believer, it surrendered to the soldier of the crescent the female captives achieved by his prowess. It promised the most voluptuous delights of its sensual heaven to the intrepid champion of the faith. "The sword," says Mohammed, "is the key of heaven and of hell; a drop of blood shed in the cause of God, a night spent in arms, is of more avail than two months' fasting or prayer; whosoever falls in battle, his sins are forgiven; at the day of judgment, his wounds shall be resplendent as vermillion and odoriferous as musk; and the loss

of his limbs shall be supplied by the wings of angels and cherubim."* To him were to be allotted, as long as eternity shall last, seventy-two houris or nymphs of paradise, of celestial beauty, virgin purity, and unfading youth. The impostor of Arabia well knew the avenues to the freebooter's heart. "Fight, fight! Paradise, paradise!" "I see, beckoning me upwards, the black-eyed maidens,"† were the frantic war-cries that sounded and reverberated along the ranks of the Saracen hosts.

Such a creed placed at the beck of the Arabian adventurer thronging bands of lawless desperadoes. His faith was disseminated, not by the power of conviction, but by the force of arms. Religion was only his pretence; his ambition was martial conquest. — Novelty and oneness of theological belief he deemed the best auxiliaries and cements of his domination. To the Jews and christians he proffered the Koran, the tribute, or the sword; on the pagans, he imposed the summary alternative of conversion or death. The triumph of his imposture was but a military achievement. As such it was no more marvellous than the barbarian conquests of Zingis Khan or Tamerlane. Its epoch

* Gibbon, vol. ix. p. 297.

† Ibid. pp. 385, 407.

was peculiarly favorable to its success. Even Gibbon affirms that, "The birth of Mohammed was fortunately placed in the most degenerate and disorderly period of the Persians, the Romans, and the barbarians of Europe; the empires of Trajan, or even of Constantine or Charlemagne, would have repelled the assault of the naked Saracens, and the torrent of fanaticism might have been obscurely lost in the sands of Arabia."*

If we compare the triumphs of the primitive heralds of the Gospel with the limited success of the christian missionaries, who labored for the conversion of heathen nations during the ten centuries preceding the present, the conclusion will be yet more irresistibly confirmed, that the former must have been aided "with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles," and special "gifts of the Holy Ghost." In no period of the history of the christian church, has the evangelizing spirit been wholly inert. Even the wild crusades of the dark ages had for their avowed object the extension of Christianity. Papal Rome has ever cherished the favorite project of extending her spiritual dominion into pagan countries. Francis Xavier, in the sixteenth

* Gibbon, vol. ix. p. 361.

century, sowed the seeds of salvation in the island of Japan, revived for a time the drooping converts of India, and sailed for China with the sublime hope of transforming into a province of christendom that mighty empire. He died a martyr to his indefatigable zeal, within sight of the Chinese coast. Since the Reformation, protestantism has rivalled, perhaps surpassed, her elder sister in efforts to disseminate "to all people" the "good tidings of great joy."

In temporal advantages, the modern missionaries immeasurably surpassed the ancient. The moderns went forth, since the termination of the dark ages, from civilized nations whom the heathen regarded as a sort of superior beings; they were educated men, familiar by previous study with the languages in which they taught; christian charity left them not utterly destitute of pecuniary means; the art of printing and the mariner's compass afforded them important facilities; commerce was their willing handmaiden; and seldom did they fail in zeal, in purity of life, in strenuousness of honest effort.

But between the limited success of the missionaries of the Gospel, in the ten centuries preceding the nineteenth, and the stupendous triumphs of its

primitive heralds, how striking was the contrast! The achievements of the modern missionaries, though often brilliant, were always ephemeral. Even the hopeful fruits of Xavier's pious toils were, soon after his decease, swept away by the returning flood of polytheism, as the closing waves of ocean obliterate the track of the passing ship. Paul may plant, and Apollos water; it is God alone who gives the increase.

Paley expatiates upon the contrast between the triumphs of the original apostles, and the comparative failure of their spiritual successors; and thence deduces the irresistible conclusion that the ancients were endowed with miraculous gifts not vouchsafed to the moderns. Bishop Wilson, of Calcutta, resident for years in the centre of oriental missions, remarks: "A greater number of Jews certainly were converted under the first discourse of Saint Peter, at the day of pentecost, than have been gained during the eighteen hundred years which have elapsed since. And as to the heathen, probably one year of the apostolic labors amongst the gentiles equalled in point of success, not merely the thirty or forty years of the united exertions of the christian church with all its external advantages of superior civilization, influence, authority, and learn-

ing in our own day, but the thousand years which preceded them.”* The American bishop, McIlvaine, pronounces his conviction, that “Paul was instrumental in converting more heathens in thirty years than all modern missionaries in the last five hundred.”†

But within the last quarter of a century, new energies have been imparted to the evangelizing spirit. An era has burst forth seemingly unparalleled save by the apostolic. The communicants of christian churches gathered from heathenism in the eastern and western continents, and in the isles of the remotest seas, and now hailed as living trophies of redeeming grace, have swollen to a mighty host. If these conversions to Christianity are genuine, they afford cheering hopes that the God of pentecost is now striving with the nations. Perhaps his own “set time” to favor Zion may not be remote. We would not irreverently speculate upon “the times or the seasons.”‡ “One day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.” But we have full assurance that the future reign of the Messiah on earth is just as certain as

* Wilson’s Evidences of Christianity, vol. i. p. 226.

† McIlvaine’s Evidences of Christianity, p. 280. ‡ Acts i. 7.

his present reign in heaven :—"For the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it." And when we contemplate the spiritual dearth of the preceding centuries, and compare it with the prospects opened by the last twenty-five years, we will accuse none of insane enthusiasm if they regard the streaks of dawning light in the moral heavens as harbingers of that long and glorious day when the beams of the Sun of righteousness shall fill the whole habitable world "as the waters cover the sea."

"Come then, and added to thy many crowns,
Receive yet one, the crown of all the earth,
Thou who alone art worthy ! It was thine
By ancient covenant, ere nature's birth ;
And thou hast made it thine by purchase since,
And overpaid its value with thy blood."*

THE END.

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